

STUCK WANTING THE SAME THING

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CASE STUDY

I was on the West Coast last week for a 2-1/2-day off-site with co-owners of a service business. Very complementary partners with a great reputation—a brother who drives sales and a sister who runs operations. When COVID essentially shut down much of the competition, they found themselves in a strong position for sudden growth.

It was a great “problem” to have, except that as the business grew, the partners became overwhelmed and reactive, losing their rhythm. Over time, they started to revert to old sibling dynamics, attempting to push through the pressure with “thick skin”—which in reality meant brushing everything under the rug and holding grudges. This made things worse, adding more strain to their already complex relationship.

As frustrations mounted, their effectiveness as business partners suffered. They found themselves distracted by issues that were both personal and professional. The business was thriving, but new clients were coming in while long-standing, loyal clients began threatening to leave. Their reputation, which they’d worked hard to build, was at risk.

In our initial work together, I had a series of Zoom calls with each of them individually, then brought them together for some joint sessions. We also involved their spouses to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. It became clear that there was much more beneath the surface than just typical business stress. The brother and sister were both carrying significant emotional burdens, some from their past and others from how their current dynamics were affecting their relationship.

They began to recognize how they had withheld from each other—whether in terms of communication, support, or trust—and how that had strained not only their partnership but also their relationships with their parents and cousins. These old family patterns, left unaddressed, were threatening to spill into their professional lives and undermine all they had built.

Conclusion

In the end, the key to overcoming their struggles lay not in simply managing business growth but in enhancing their emotional intelligence and deepening their mutual understanding. The brother and sister had spent years building a business on complementary skills, but as the stakes grew higher, the emotional dynamics of their partnership began to overshadow their professional strengths. By shifting from reactive behavior to proactive emotional awareness, they were able to identify the underlying issues that were holding them back—not just the day-to-day business challenges but

the deeper interpersonal tensions that were quietly eroding their effectiveness as partners and leaders.

The work we did together allowed them to step out of their old patterns and face their challenges with new clarity. They learned to recognize when they were slipping into unproductive dynamics and how to recalibrate their relationship for better collaboration. Rather than ignoring the tensions between them, they embraced them as an opportunity for growth, not only as business owners but also as siblings with a shared legacy and future. Through emotional awareness, they were able to find balance in their roles as owners, leaders, and family members, creating a stronger foundation for the next phase of their business journey.

By focusing on their emotional landscape, this brother-sister team was able to regain their rhythm, reconnect with each other, and continue growing the business without losing sight of the values and relationships that got them there. In the end, it was their ability to evolve emotionally that enabled them to execute a winning growth strategy and solidify their position as strong, effective partners in the company’s future.

This is the transformative experience cultivated the missing self-awareness and empathy that allowed them to navigate the inevitable challenges that arise. Winning, as they now understand, isn’t just who’s right or wrong, doing more or less. It’s about emotional alignment and understanding the deeper forces at play in both business and relationships. When partners are in sync emotionally, they can navigate growth and adversity alike, creating a foundation for long-term success.

The Big Takeaways

- They must stay front-and-center with each other to lead the company’s growth. We referred to this as: “Being in the service of each other.”
- They must pay attention to the deep emotions that surface and use them to make better decisions. We referred to this as having compassion for each other’s shortcomings—after all, they had the same difficult upbringing.
- They must focus on developing themselves in three primary roles: as owners/partners, as leaders/employees, and as siblings with a shared family in the balance. We referred to this as: Be the best for each other—it’s good for everyone.

Winning requires emotional awareness to identify the issues you know are there but can’t pinpoint, and solve problems that are clearly visible but haven’t been successfully addressed. This partnership is now back on track, with the emotional awareness needed to execute a winning growth strategy.