

HOME-BASED BUSINESS

Employing family members can be answer for firms

Many entrepreneurs bring their family members into their businesses and for home-based firms it is often a necessity.

Omaha city ordinance stipulates that home-based companies can employ only family members, so for many business owners in need of extra help, parents, spouses or children are their only alternatives.

Several home-based business owners offered advice on how to form a family employment relationship without causing rifts among relatives and trouble at work.

Michael L. O'Brien, a CPA who works out of his home, hired his wife, Doris, as a secretary and receptionist.

"When I started my own practice in 1981 it seemed to make sense for economic reasons," he said. "By then the kids were old enough and she needed something else to do anyway."

O'Brien said working with his wife has proven to be good for the business.

"I think it depends on the relationship you have with the relative you are working with," he said. "Many times relatives will be more conscientious and have more interest in the business and its success than someone who just sees it as a job."

O'Brien said although the arrangement works well, it has its challenges.

"One downside to having a relative working for you is that it makes it a little harder to leave business at the office," he said. "Whether you work with a wife, son or brother, it's easy to take your work into a family or social setting. One thing you can do is to make an effort and agree not to talk about the office when you aren't there."

O'Brien said it also is important not to hire a relative just because he is related to you.

"You should think long and hard before hiring a relative," he said. "Take a look at the existing relationship and consider putting that relative into an employee situation and how that might change the relationship. Generally, you know a relative better than someone off the street, and you have to look at him and ask yourself if you would hire him if he weren't related to you."

O'Brien said another general rule is not to bring relatives

Dixie Bettini, owner of Dixie's Finest, which makes decorated wedding cakes and manufactures icing, said having her children, Chris, 19, Nicole, 17, and Nathaniel, 16, work for the company is a plus.

"They make deliveries, do label designs and pretty much help with everything from start to finish," Bettini said. "They all do shows with me and help with loading, unloading and setting up. It's a whole family thing."

Bettini said her daughter, Nicole, is most involved with the business.

"She does lots of the grocery shopping, decorating and delivery," Bettini said. "Nicole has even delivered cakes on her way to high school at 6 a.m."

Bettini's sons have other part-time jobs, but she said they help out when needed.

"The idea is that whatever it takes, we do it as a family," she said. "If Nicole and I are working, the boys will make dinner."

Bettini urges other entrepreneurs not to count on their children wanting to be a part of their businesses.

"You can't expect them to do it," she said. "As much as you think it's what they ought to do, sometimes they've been around the business so much they don't want to do it. It's like anything else. If they don't enjoy what they're doing, they won't do it well, and then you'll be disappointed."

Bettini said talking children into being part of a home-

based family business can mean trouble.

"We're locked in this house from the time we start until the time we stop, and then the rest of the day we are home as a family," she said. "If the children don't enjoy what they're doing, then it's not fun. You can't lock the door and leave when you're done either, because you're already at home."

Steve Miller, owner of Steve Miller Photography, hired his mother to work full time for him. The firm mostly handles wedding and family portraits, and Miller's mother takes care of all the bookings, consultations and sales.

"She is my only employee, and it's nice to keep the business in the family," Miller said. "It keeps everything closely knit and private to a point. The business is in her house, and it's a good job for her."

"I've sent her to schools and seminars and she makes decisions on album styles," he said. "She also gives input as to what people like and don't like and gives ideas about how the bride can pose and things like that."

Miller said the business arrangement with his mother works well, but he offered some advice to people considering hiring their relatives to work for their home-based firms.

"You need to make sure you are really going to be able to get along together," he said. "Hiring someone with computer experience is a good idea, too. Almost every business involves computer work. Mom knew a little about computers, but I had to teach her some, too."

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if he weren't related to you."

O'Brien said another general rule is not to bring relatives into a business operated by two unrelated parties.

"In general, I'm not too enthusiastic about working with relatives," he said. "We are very fortunate it has worked out for us because it can cause problems. For example, say your partner's son works for the business, and he turns out to be a real dud. How do you go to your partner and tell him you need to fire his son?"

O'Brien said business owners also should require their children to hold another job before hiring them themselves.

"I think having children trained and allowing them to succeed with someone who is not related to them will help them become better employees," O'Brien said. "They'll be better additions to the business if they make it on their own first."