7 Conversations Every Wealth Advisor Should Have with Family Business Clients

Protecting Family Wealth Across Generations

GOLDHILL GROUP
COACHING FOR GROWING COMPANIES

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Introduction

Wealth advisors often play a central role in helping families preserve financial capital across generations.

Yet many advisors quietly acknowledge a difficult truth:

> *"The greatest threats to generational wealth rarely come from investment performance.*

They come from:

- Family conflict
- Unclear leadership transitions
- Unprepared heirs
- Lack of governance structures

In family enterprises, financial decisions are often intertwined with family relationships, history, and expectations.

Because of this, the most successful wealth advisors understand that protecting family wealth often requires addressing both financial structures and family dynamics.

This guide highlights seven conversations that wealth advisors can initiate with family business clients to strengthen long-term alignment and leadership continuity.

CONVERSATION 1

Preparing the Next Generation to Work Together

One of the most common concerns I hear from founders and wealth advisors is simple but deeply important: "Will the next generation work well together?"

Building wealth is difficult. Preserving it across generations can be even harder.

Many families assume that their children will naturally find ways to collaborate when the time comes. But without clear expectations, defined roles, and open communication, even close siblings can struggle when leadership or ownership decisions are involved.

Wealth advisors often recognize this risk early. They may notice questions such as:

- Which child should lead the company?
- Should all siblings have equal ownership?
- What happens if one sibling works in the business and another does not?

These are not simply financial questions. They are family leadership questions.

Preparing the next generation to worktogether requires intentional development. This might include:

- Leadership development for successors
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Regular family meetings to discuss business issues
- Mentorship between generations

Families that address these issues early often discover that collaboration becomes much easier. When families avoid these conversations, misunderstandings and resentment can quietly build over time.

The goal is not simply to transfer wealth or ownership. The goal is to prepare the next generation to lead responsibly and work together effectively.

KEY MOMENTS

This usually comes up when:

- Children are entering their 20s–30s
- The founder is still in control
- Roles are unclear
- The advisor senses potential future conflict

ADVISOR TIP

You might say to the family: "At some point, we should bring in someone who specializes in helping families prepare the next generation to work together." That "someone" could be Jonathan Goldhill.

CONVERSATION 2

Creating Structure for Family Decision-Making

Many successful families build significant wealth but never develop a structure for making family decisions. In the early years of a company, decisions are simple. The founder decides.

As the family grows, however, questions begin to emerge:

- Who has the authority to make business decisions?
- How are disagreements resolved?
- What role do family members outside the business play?

> "*Without a clear structure, decision-making can become confusing and emotionally charged.*

This is why many multi-generational families eventually create family governance structures.

These often include:

- Family councils
- Family meetings
- Written family agreements
- Clear communication processes

These structures are not about bureaucracy. They are about clarity.

When families establish governance systems, they create a framework that helps prevent conflict and keeps the focus on shared goals. In many cases these systems become essential to maintaining both family harmony and business success across generations.

CONVERSATION 3

Preparing Heirs to Become Responsible Owners

Managing wealth successfully across generations requires more than investment expertise. It requires responsible ownership.

Many founders worry about whether their children will be prepared to handle the responsibilities that come with family wealth or ownership in a business.

COMMON CONCERNS

- Do they understand the financial responsibilities involved?
- Will they feel entitled or accountable?
- Are they prepared to make thoughtful decisions?

Preparing heirs to become responsible owners involves more than financial education. It often includes:

- Leadership development
- Exposure to business operations
- Mentorship from experienced leaders
- Participation in family governance discussions

The objective is not simply to prepare heirs to inherit wealth. It is to prepare them to steward the family enterprise thoughtfully and responsibly.

Families that invest in ownership education often find that the next generation becomes more confident, engaged, and aligned with the family's long-term vision.

CONVERSATION 4

The Value of Annual Family Retreats

Many successful families hold annual meetings or retreats to maintain alignment across generations. These gatherings provide a rare opportunity for family members to step away from day-to-day responsibilities and focus on the bigger picture.

Topics often discussed include:

- The future of the family business
- Family values and legacy
- Philanthropic initiatives
- Leadership development for the next generation

For some families, these meetings are purely informational. For others, they become important moments for decision-making and reflection.

When facilitated thoughtfully, family retreats can create space for honest conversation and deeper understanding between generations. They also allow younger family members to become more engaged in the family enterprise.

Over time, these gatherings often become an important tradition that helps strengthen both the family and the business.

CONVERSATION 5

When a Neutral Facilitator Can Help

Family businesses often face complex conversations. These might involve leadership transitions, ownership decisions, or differences in vision between generations.

Because these discussions involve both business and family relationships, they can sometimes become emotionally charged.

This is where a neutral facilitator can be helpful.

AN OUTSIDE ADVISOR BRINGS:

- Objectivity
- Structure to conversations
- Experience with similar family dynamics

A facilitator's role is not to make decisions for the family. Instead, they help guide the conversation so that family members can express their perspectives, understand each other's concerns, and move toward solutions.

Many families discover that having a neutral guide allows them to address issues that may have been difficult to discuss on their own.

CONVERSATION 6

Creating a Shared Purpose Across Generations

As families transition from one generation to the next, a natural question often arises:

> *What does this wealth or business ultimately represent for our family?*

The answer is different for every family. Some focus on entrepreneurial growth. Others emphasize philanthropy. Still others focus on preserving the family legacy.

Clarifying a shared purpose can help guide important decisions, including:

- Investment strategies
- Business leadership choices
- Philanthropic initiatives
- Family governance structures

When families articulate their shared values and purpose, they create a framework that helps align decisions across generations.

Without this shared understanding, different family members may pursue different priorities, sometimes creating confusion or tension. A clearly defined family purpose can become a powerful anchor for the family enterprise.

CONVERSATION 7

Why Family Businesses Require a Unique Leadership Approach

Family businesses operate differently from other companies. Leadership decisions often involve both business strategy and family relationships.

For example:

- A leadership transition may involve a parent and a child
- Ownership may be shared among siblings
- Family members outside the business may influence decisions

These dynamics create challenges that traditional business frameworks do not always address.

> **THE DUAL APPROACH**
>
> Successful family enterprises often benefit from advisors who understand both:
>
> - Business leadership
> - Family dynamics

When these two dimensions are aligned, families are better positioned to sustain both their relationships and their businesses across generations.

Conclusion

Wealth advisors play a critical role in helping families preserve financial capital.

Yet sustaining wealth across generations often requires attention to leadership, governance, and family alignment as well.

By encouraging these seven conversations, advisors can help families build stronger foundations for long-term success.

When financial strategy and family leadership are aligned, families are far more likely to sustain both their wealth and their relationships across generations.

About Jonathan Goldhill

Jonathan Goldhill is a family business advisor and business and executive coach who has spent more than 35 years helping founder-led companies and their successors navigate leadership transitions and scale their businesses. He has a passion for guiding the next generation of leaders because he missed out on this type of mentoring from his family's business, which proclaimed itself as the #1 volume producer of men's apparel in the U.S., founded by his great-grandfather in 1897 and expanded under the leadership of his three sons, before ceasing operations in 1986.

He is the host of *The Disruptive Successor Show*, a podcast featuring next-generation leaders transforming family businesses and the author of *Disruptive Success: A Guide for Driving Growth in Your Family Business*.

Through The Goldhill Group, Jonathan works with family businesses to strengthen leadership, align family dynamics, install best practices in growing enterprises, and prepare the next generation for responsible ownership.