

# Stop the Fighting on the Way to the Funeral Home

*Family-business consultant shares best practices to help farm families successfully transition their farms and ranches to the next generation.*

Story & photo by  
**KINDRA GORDON,**  
field editor

Have you ever considered: “If dad died today, what would happen to the family farm?”

Not only does Jolene Brown ask families that question, she’s counseled families who deal with that very real scenario. Iowa-based Brown lives and works on a farm with her husband, Keith, but she’s also a champion for agriculture through her roles as author, professional speaker and family-business consultant.

Brown says she’s on a mission to share best practices for families to help successfully transition their farms and ranches to the next generation.

Another question Brown likes to ask is this: Have you ever been bitten by an elephant? The answer is always no. Then she asks, “How about a mosquito? ... It’s the little things that get us, and soon we are fighting on the way to the funeral home.”

Brown is an advocate for

communication and planning among family members to create a succession plan for the future of their business. During her Cattlemen’s College® session at the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn., Brown shared many stories of the mistakes she’s seen families make.

Topping the list of mistakes is a mind-set placing family first as opposed to business first. Brown says, “Sometimes a family-first business works out — that’s luck.”

She promotes a business-first mind-set and says, “That does not mean the family is less important. Instead, it suggests that members

honor the family so much that they are willing to take care of business.”

Along with that, she emphasizes, “Just because you were born together doesn’t mean you should work together. Acceptance in a family is unconditional. Acceptance in a business is conditional and not a birthright.”

Before family members come back to the farm or ranch, Brown advocates they work for someone else for two to three years. She points out that this gives them a multitude of perspective — from taking

orders from a boss and learning to show up on time to realizing they can be fired.

If the business owners and leaders do agree that additional family members (the next generation) can and should be incorporated into the business from a financial perspective, Brown says several aspects should be considered. No. 1 is the question: If you want to come back to the farm or ranch and work, what do you bring to the business? Are you a great mechanic, herdsman, etc., and does the business need those attributes?

The process of bringing the next generation into a family business is not an easy one, Brown conceded, but with communication it can be done.

For more about Brown and the advice she shares, visit [www.jolenebrown.com](http://www.jolenebrown.com). She offers a book titled *Sometimes You Need More Than a 2x4* with how-to tips and real-life experiences of working with families in business.



**Editor’s Note:** This article is part of the Angus Journal’s online event coverage of the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show. You can view the Journal’s coverage in its entirety in the newsroom at [www.4cattlemen.com](http://www.4cattlemen.com).



“Just because you were born together doesn’t mean you should work together,” says Jolene Brown. “Acceptance in a family is unconditional. Acceptance in a business is conditional and not a birthright.”