

**Sam Cooper: To Stay with the Family Firm or Not!**

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**Abstract**

This decision based critical incident describes Sam Cooper's dilemma of whether to continue working at his family's business where he had worked for ten years, or to instead accept an offer to become an assistant manager at a large retail company. The family business offered such advantages as enjoyable work, close customer relationships, flexible work hours, and the chance to finish college. However, staying with the family firm meant that Sam would likely have to accept his father's quite informal approaches to managing the firm, which had frustrated Sam for quite some time. The job as assistant manager offered benefits including a career path with upward potential, a standard benefits package, and formal managerial practices but had drawbacks including long hours, frequent moves around the country, and probable curtailment of his college education. Sam, a married 36-year-old father of three, was left to make this critical career and family decision.

**Learning Outcomes**

In completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Recognize and compare the strategic considerations for Sam as he faces a potentially critical decision point in his career.
2. Analyze the situation and identify reasons that may explain why small business owners resist managerial practices such as formal training manuals and standard financial controls.
3. Comprehend the managerial practices within small businesses that may hinder growth and increase turnover of talented employees.

**Application**

This incident is appropriate for use in human resource management and small business-entrepreneurship courses. The key issue in the incident is personal career planning. A directly related issue is the impact of the informal financial and management practices in small family businesses on employees, including family members, and on the firm's potential for growth.

**Key Words**

career transitioning, informal management, family business, financial control procedures, firm legitimacy

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