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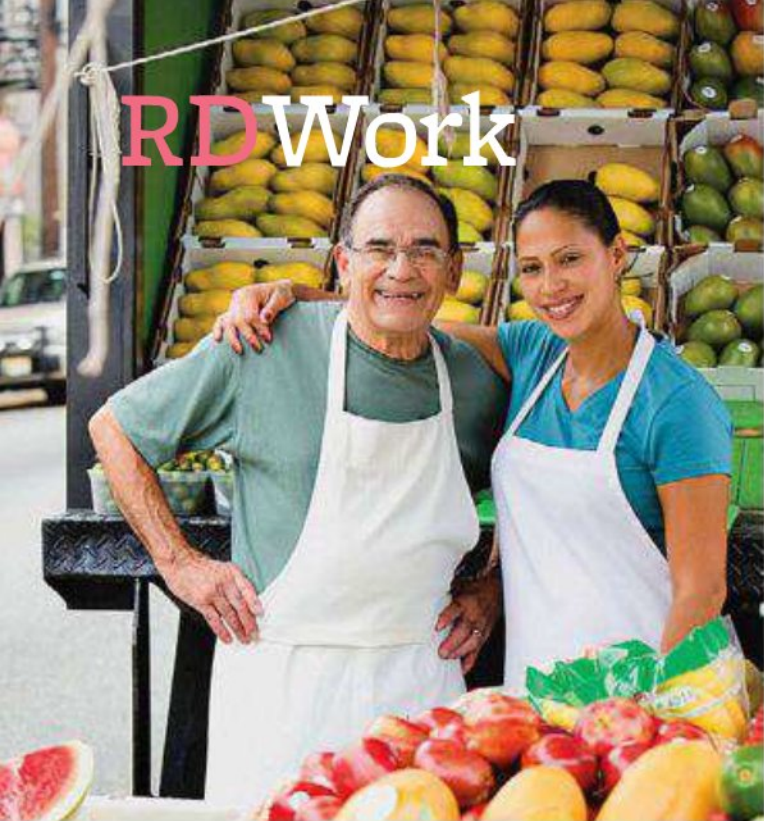
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## Dad's the Boss: Tips for Surviving a Family Business

**W**hen it comes to business decisions, the co-owners of ViBE Dance & Fitness Studio in Thornhill, Ont., typically see eye to eye. Just as you might expect from identical twins. “It’s a huge advantage because we trust each other implicitly,” says Marnie Schwartz, whose business partner is her twin sister, Rena Schwartz.

Yet such harmony is sometimes elusive in family businesses. Two consultants who specialize in family enterprises—Jim Reger of Victoria and Val Monk of Winnipeg—weigh in on how to avoid strife.

**1. Honour your personal and professional boundaries.** “The only rights you have are given by your position and job description,” says Reger. As a family member, you have broad in-

terests in the business, “but the sooner you define each person’s role, expectations and responsibilities, the better,” he says.

**2. Prove your worth.** Try gaining experience outside the family business. Responsibilities and titles should go to people who’ve shown they deserve them. “You need to earn the role,” says Monk. Working in a family business is a privilege, not a right. Favoured treatment can cause resentment among family and nonfamily staff alike.

**3. Air things out respectfully.** Any business environment can showcase pet peeves and power struggles—that’s often already built into the family dynamic. “You’re going to have conflict, but it’s all about open communication,” says Reger. Even the Schwartz twins argue, but by doing so openly and honestly, they quickly move on. Both consultants recommended involving an outside mediator for more serious discussions.

**4. Focus on family and business.** There are times when what’s good for the business and what’s good for the family may conflict, comments Monk. Family members need to accept that differences and disagreements will occur at work. But in resolving them, remember that the best business practice involves family values: open communication, respect and trust.

*Stuart Foxman*