

CHAPTER 1

Making of a Myth

How stories of heroism help and harm a successor

Hollywood Boulevard, the early 1920s. It was the Golden Age of Cinema. Starlets were fetching their dreams, and so was a young shoemaker from Italy.

A scrap from a scrapbook, the photograph reads like a chapter from an autobiography. A lady sits on a curvaceous mohair sofa, her foot propped on a stool. Salvatore Ferragamo stoops over in white overalls—“like an artist or painter,” his son, Massimo, chairman of Ferragamo USA, recalls—sketching a shoe as he studies the size and curve of the lady’s foot.

“In that picture is everything,” Massimo says. “My father always said, ‘Whenever a customer comes into the store, you should make them feel like a princess. And each time a princess walks into your store, you should make them feel like a queen.’” Salvatore Ferragamo crafted shoes for heirs of royalty, even those who knew no pedigree, title, or crown. It was his talent of interpreting peculiar and extravagant requests, like a shoe with ostrich feathers, matched by his heart for customers, that made him wildly popular.

Decades later, Marilyn Monroe sat on Ferragamo’s sofa. She was beautiful but short. To be taller, she always wore four-and-a-half uncomfortable inches of heel. But Salvatore, who studied anatomy at the University of Southern California, made a shoe comfortable that she felt beautifully tall in. Massimo says this was typical of his father: “Everything he did throughout his life, he did with incredible heart and creativity.”

Salvatore died when his youngest son, Massimo, was almost three years old. But even today, his father is ever-present: “Almost every day I find myself telling the story of my father,” he says. “When one leaves a legacy like he left, it’s indestructible.”

The stories Massimo retells hint at the heroic. At 15, Salvatore Ferragamo boarded a ship to the States by himself, and briefly worked in a cowboy boot factory in Boston. Disenchanted with the one-size-fits-all assembly-line production of shoes, Salvatore headed west and opened a shoe repair and made-to-order shop in California. There his empire was born—and where he staked his claim as the “Shoemaker to the Stars.” Thirteen years later, he returned to his homeland, expanding the business, then filing for bankruptcy during the Depression, and then rebuilding the business in the 1950s. When Salvatore passed away in 1960, hundreds of artisans produced hundreds of handmade shoes daily.

“Though there were setbacks,” says Massimo, “he always recovered from them and always made [his family’s] life better and helped everyone that was around him.” One such story was that of an old man named Zacharia. When Salvatore’s shoe business lost its footing, he was so poor he couldn’t even pay for a ride home from work. Zacharia would take Salvatore home in his horse-drawn carriage. Every ride Salvatore would say, “I have no money, but one day I will repay you.” When Zacharia died, Salvatore found Zacharia’s wife, paid his debt, and hired their daughter to work in the factory.

Like many successors, Massimo’s admiration of his father was fueled by the myth of his father: the testimony of family, friends, the community, employees, suppliers, buyers, and even scrapbook news clippings. Salvatore’s rags-to-riches story was studded with kindness, perseverance, and dedication to a craft. “I always grew up with great admiration for what he did and for how he did it—for the sacrifices,” says Massimo. “How lucky [am I] that I had a father who did things like that?” The stories of Salvatore’s sacrifices not only connected Massimo to his deceased father, but they also transmitted the values core to the Ferragamo brand: integrity, value, craftsmanship, tradition, and timeless excellence.

The Power of the Myth

Heroic stories of visionary leaders—such as Salvatore Ferragamo, who take risks and do amazing things—can cast a long shadow.

Their accomplishments, challenges faced, and a long list of successes are monolithic and magical. These stories are powerful and map out a view of the world. They create a system of values and beliefs that shape the way that family, successors, and employees see themselves and the company. Their influence on the next generation is both positive and negative. Their legacy can either illuminate an exciting path for the next generation to follow into the future or cast a shadow that stifles the growth and development of the next generation. It is in the shadow that the myth of the heroic and invincible parent or family expands. Successors can follow down the rabbit hole of a myth or emerge from the shadows onto a new path of their own making. Every family has a mythology that has both generative and destructive power, which either builds or erodes the foundation for the future of the family business.

The Good Story

Stories can both help and hurt a successor's development. The myths and stories about Salvatore Ferragamo helped young Massimo connect to his father, who died when Massimo was almost three years old. These stories provided a foundation of values and principles to guide him, and a core belief that great things are possible. They helped to make meaning of what had gone before. This is the generative aspect of a mythology, and it is usually system-centric, meaning that it engages everyone in the family system towards establishing a foundation of clear values, a clear sense of purpose, and a vision for the future. It is not built to feed the ego of the individual or create an idealized image of the perfect family. Wanda Ferragamo ensured that her husband's vision was stronger than his legend, and she made sure that all her children traced their own paths within the family business to fulfill Salvatore's vision.

The stories of great family business leaders connect successors to the past and help to make sense of what has gone before. They provide a sense of stability and belonging, and often transmit the values that form the foundation for a successor's leadership success. I talked to a fourth-generation leader of a 100-year-old retail company. Founded in the late 1800s, the company manufactured clothing, and over the years established a broad network of retail stores across the Midwest. As the retail environment became increasingly challenging, the family shifted to become one of the strongest online

retailers in their space. In 2009, a family that had survived two world wars, the Great Depression, and countless recessions was still at the top of its game. When I asked its 40-year-old leader how the company was surviving the economic downturn, he said, “We made it through the Depression, so we can make it through this.”

Karl-Erivan Haub, CEO of the multibillion-dollar global retailer Tengelmann Group, talks of his family history, how his parents, grandparents, and great grandparents survived two world wars, five currency changes, and multiple economic crises. He says, “It creates the notion that, OK, these generations have suffered through that. They persevered and we have to persevere.”

The stories of the successes of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents grounded these successors with the confidence that they would overcome almost any challenge that they would face. These stories foreshadowed an end to the story: Everything would be OK.

Mary Vermeer Andringa, Chairman and CEO of the Vermeer Corporation, an agricultural and industrial equipment manufacturer, recalls the values passed on through the stories of her father, Gary Vermeer. A pilot, her father often drew analogies to flying in speeches he delivered to staff and dealers. To calm people in the midst of a down market, he would talk about how between take-off and landing, weather can shift from clement to inclement or from inclement to clement. The point he made is one that the organization draws on to this day: “Things never get so good, like good weather, that they don’t get worse; and things never get so bad, like bad weather, that they don’t get better.” At their best, the stories of family business predecessors are a guiding light for a successor on the journey to developing credibility as the next generation leader.

These myths are most helpful and productive when they transmit a sense of stability as well as a sense of values and culture that can help guide behavior. They provide a sense of meaning and purpose to a large and often complex system.

The Bad Story

But every myth has its dark side. The myth of a family business is destructive when it becomes egocentric, bolstering the ego of the founder or the collective ego of the family. All the energy of the myth is concentrated on making a hero of a leader rather than

energizing the entire family across generations. It doesn't tap into the passions, beliefs, inspiration, and contribution of others in the family and the business. It is driven primarily by the need to promote the ego of one individual or protect the family image. The myth spins out stories that laud successes, while stripping away the faults, failures, and vulnerabilities that make these people and their families human. At their best, myths convey truth, but an egocentric mythology creates a feeling of inauthenticity instead. The system seeks to protect its image by pretending that the failures, problems, and vulnerabilities don't exist. They aggrandize the good and parse out the bad, focusing on heroics rather than incorporating failure into the narrative. In fact, an entire area of publishing memorializes this idea—that of *vanity press*. While not every book written about the founding or history of a family business has the *vanity* narrative, many do. These are books where larger-than-life leaders seek to legitimize and tell stories of their own greatness. While this feeds their egos and tells a great story, it can suck the air out of the room for a successor. It seems the legendary leader is responsible for all of this success.

This destructive mythology can create a shadow that eclipses the talent of future family leaders, who are unable to find their sense of identity and strength, to discover their passions, and to determine what beliefs they hold in common with parents and family, and where they differ. Caught in this shadow, successors can wilt and die. They often succumb to entitlement, addiction, depression, and unhappiness. When the successor gets caught in the shadow, these families tend to deteriorate into infighting, anger, self-protection, and selfishness. These families tend to produce successors with low self-esteem and self-worth. One-dimensional narratives of a fearless and visionary leader also establish the wrong idea that a successor must also lead without fear, doubt, or vulnerability. These stories encourage the belief that the successes of their predecessors were magical and repeating similar feats would be impossible. Successors wrongly conclude that in order to be successful, you have to be born with magical (and unattainable) leadership traits.

These myths can also create the idea—as it did for Bill Wrigley Jr., former CEO of the William Wrigley Jr. Company—that successors must lead in the way their father/mother led. When a child excessively emulates her parent, she thinks, “My father was a legend, so I must be just like him in order to lead the organization—or not

lead at all.” And others surrounding the family business, as in the Steinbrenner case, feed that narrative.

Understanding the Reality of the Myth

We are all born into a story already being told. In the context of a family business, these stories become larger than life and, often, become myths. These stories that we tell are not of one person’s making, they are built on people’s perceptions of what happened, and not what actually happened. They are often idealized interpretations expressed by many individuals: employees, the community, the press, as well as the parents and successors themselves. Simply, the stories don’t tell the whole story. A founder may have led an organization through the Depression, like Salvatore Ferragamo—a heroic feat. A founder may have sold paper to Paul Revere to produce the first Continental Currency. The family may have personally sacrificed to avoid layoffs in the Depression. Or the family may have saved much of Fleet Street during the Nazi bombing of London. But these stories often distort reality by telling only one part of the story. They focus on the positive outcomes, often overlooking challenges and failures and vulnerabilities that led to the success. They combine the stories of many and tell it as if it were one. They create a story of mythic proportions that seems impossible to repeat.

To believe that the success of a parent magically exists apart from his (and often his family’s) sacrifice, the ideas and support of others, good timing, hard work, and a lot or a little luck, is to live in the shadow of the myth. In retelling the stories, successors create a narrative that further shadows reality: “I can never be like her!” This is shadowland living: to live life in reaction to these stories of the past rather than creating possibilities (and stories) for the future.

The fact is, a predecessor’s qualities and skill sets may not be the qualities and skill sets that the company will need in its leader to move forward. The faster its pace and the bigger it becomes, the more a business requires a different type of leader for it to thrive. The skills needed to start a business and build it to a \$50 million company are very different than the skills needed to grow to a \$100 million or \$200 million company.

Mythologizing also can build up an individual while skimming over the truth that the successes were earned by the hard work of many and the good fortune accumulated over time. Myths don’t

account for learning that comes from repeated failure, the dogged persistence, and the small disciplines that form the backbone of greatness. Instead of tempering these myths and grounding them in reality, children can get caught up in their grandness, projecting their parents as mighty and all-powerful figures. Once that story has built momentum, it is hard to reel in reality. The predecessor keeps getting bigger while the successor shrinks into the shadows.

For a young leader to step out of this shadow, he or she must winnow truth from myth. It's part of the work that precedes success. Each family's mythology has a mix of generative qualities and destructive tendencies. It tells stories that teach values that inspire and unify families, as well as stories that stifle a family's creative energies. Show me a successful successor in a family business, and I'll show you someone who sorted through the myth, separated truth from fiction, and began to build on the past with a fresh approach to leadership. They become generative leaders by leveraging the legacy of their family and building a foundation to meet the needs of future generations. These successors rewrite the stories that stifle the energy, passion, and creativity of a family, and leverage the generative stories to establish a foundation of values and beliefs that can sustain the health of both family and business. These are generative leaders, who leave a legacy that invigorates and empowers others, laying the foundation for success across generations.

Origins of the Myth

These myths are built by the very human need to idealize our leaders. As children, the first people we idealize are our parents. To feel safe, children must believe their parents are a little more than human. After all, who will save them from the boogey man under the bed, if not *superparent*? If children saw their parents as fallible at this young age, it would create overwhelming anxiety and make it almost impossible to live. Children exist in a world that they have little control of, and they have to rely on others to navigate. The positive light of the myth of the parent calms their fears. Idealization of parents is prevalent in large part because young children tend to think in absolutes. They live in an either/or, not both/and, reality. Because they cannot integrate duality, they fail to understand that even the good guys have flaws, even Superman has his kryptonite. The stories, formed through idealization, don't allow for parental weaknesses.

As children mature, they continue to idealize parents in an effort to seek protection from those external forces that chip away security, self-worth, and purpose. This is particularly true for children whose parents are continually absent because of their leadership role in the business. Missed birthdays, failure to attend baseball games and piano recitals, absence from the everyday rituals of life—like dinner, homework and bedtime stories—can be righted by a child through idealization. A parent’s absence can be filled with the story, “My dad is so important to so many people. He is serving the greater good. Of course he can’t take the time to be with me!” Accepting the opposing story (“Dad is more devoted to the business than he is to me. Maybe he doesn’t love me.”) can lead to feelings of abandonment, self-doubt, and resentment—feelings too painful, too threatening, and too big for most to process at a young age.

The myth that children develop does not reconcile the ideal (what the world should be) to the real (what the world really is). It, in fact, distorts reality. The myth, often fed by employees as well as the community, becomes a convenient way for children to pretend not to know what they don’t want to face. While a parent has had many successes, they also have flaws and vulnerabilities, and they even sometimes hurt others. Although it might be easier not to confront this reality, it is not beneficial. In fact, it is dangerous. Idealizing parents can stunt a child’s ability to deal with the good and bad in others and in the world. The path to mature adulthood requires the integration of the good and bad; the development of a sense of autonomy from parents; the skills to manage emotions in the face of difficult circumstances; and the habits of forging healthy relationships with others despite their flaws. The problem with idealization—and, hence, with hero making—is that it simplifies the human experience by accounting for only the good.

Feeding the Myth

Parents often encourage the creation of these myths out of their own sense of ego, or their insecurities. Because of feelings of guilt or remorse over their failures and vulnerabilities, they encourage the creation of a mythology, and assume the role of the hero. It makes them feel like it has all been worth it. The telling of these heroic stories can bolster a sometimes-fragile ego. They can justify all of the sacrifices—like the missed birthday parties and soccer games.

In her book *Daring Greatly* (2014), Brene Brown notes that the tendencies towards narcissism are born out of the fear and vulnerability that I am not enough.¹ I am not smart enough; I'm not good looking enough. I'm not experienced enough. These insecurities can feed the parent's desire to feed the myth.

Stories also create meaning for the people surrounding the family business. The stories impart stability, as well as a sense that someone is looking out for their interests. They also communicate the values that form the culture of the organization. This culture can be a positive force guiding the behaviors of those in the system, creating a unified sense of purpose. But they can also be the source of resistance when change is needed. Rarely do family businesses grow when successors buy into the belief that the way the predecessor did things is automatically the right way.

If It Makes You Happy

Idealization also can lead to parent pleasing. "If-it-makes-dad-happy" reasoning stems from the belief that dad (who is perfect) is always right. For many family-run businesses, the "right" thing is to take over the business. It's been the (often unspoken) plan since conception. Many children have dreams and passions that exist apart from leading the business. Idealization can strap children to the business. To break free is risky. Not only might a child disappoint the parent, whose approval she's been trying to earn since childhood, but also she might invite conflict. Idealization encourages a pretend version of success. A son sees the great successes of his parents, but overlooks how his father may yell, scream, and disrespect those around him.

The successors who are able to step out of the shadows—to differentiate—aren't forced into leadership but instead have a sense of freedom. Massimo Ferragamo credits his success as a leader to his parents, who openly encouraged each child to find their calling in life. Massimo, in fact, wasn't going to join the business; "I had other things in mind," he said, like going to law school and traveling to America, where he worked at Saks 5th Avenue. After developing a sense of what he was good at and how he could better serve the company, he jumped in, operating the flagship store in the

¹Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012).

United States. He says, “You have to understand your calling in life, what you should be doing, and improve upon what has been handed down to you.” Children who aren’t given this freedom to discover their calling might struggle to give strong, directional leadership to the family business. They might lack focus and energy because they are working out of duty rather than interest and passion.

The end result is that the myth can cause children to frame their value (who they are) in relation to their parents. No matter the effort, their successes never seem to measure up to the greatness of the parent. Their value, they believe, is doing what dad did. Take Peter, for instance, a long-standing third-generation heir in a large northwest timber business. Peter’s grandfather started the business, but it was his father, Daniel, who built the business from a ten-million-dollar company to the billion-dollar company it is today. Peter’s dad seemed to have the Midas touch. In reality, Peter didn’t see a lot of his father growing up. Daniel tried to get to his son’s football games, but often failed to show up because of a pressing business issue.

When Peter went to the office as a child, he saw how the people who worked for his dad seemed to worship him. Peter saw his dad infrequently, so he learned about the business just for an excuse to talk with his dad and visit him at the company office. His father’s long track record of success, and the fact that people regaled him with great stories of his dad whenever they found out that he was Daniel Johnson’s son, led Peter to believe that in order to be successful, he had to do things like dad.

His father was truly a great leader, but because of the demands of the job of the CEO, Peter was often shielded from many of the struggles and failures, fears, and doubt that had led to his dad’s success. Thus, it just all seemed to magically happen.

This cost Peter a sense of who he was and what he valued. Peter’s pursuit of a relationship with his dad through his pursuit of the timber business distracted Peter from what he was interested in (biology), passionate about, and good at. He said he felt a nagging sense of fear about his leadership: *How could I possibly do anything that could match what my father has done?*

The temptation to emulate one’s parents is strong, almost irresistible. But my research indicates that those who succeed in taking the family business to greater heights tend to figure out at some point to lean into their strengths. They meet challenges with their vision and view of current reality rather than trying to do what dad would

do. Most leaders seem to figure this out by the end of their thirties. The older one gets, the harder it is to make these shifts—the patterns become so ingrained, the belief systems hardened. During his or her twenties and thirties, the future successor’s job is to wrestle with who he or she is apart from the myth he or she is born into: *How do I form my own opinion? How do I show up as an adult in my family, where I’ve been a kid for my entire life? Can I make the shift toward acting like an adult? Can I sit at the big boy or big girl table?*

Keeping the Next Generation in the Shadows

There are a variety of patterns that can keep a successor in the shadows, but here I will focus on three: *idealization*, *parentification*, and *infantalization* of the successor. Keeping a successor in the shadows is rarely a conscious decision; rather, it usually is an expression of the unconscious anxiety that a family and parents have about a family member differentiating—becoming one’s own person. Subconsciously they may think, “If he doesn’t emulate me, then they don’t see me as worthy.” So the family business system then creates a false reality through idealization, parentification, or infantilization.

Idealization of the Child

Every parent of a park district baseball team secretly believes that his son is a cut above the rest, that he just may have a shot at a professional baseball career. Every daughter has a shot at making the Olympic soccer team. It’s part of the American suburban narrative. What parent doesn’t believe her child is a wunderkind, a child prodigy? Parents partly (and unwittingly) countenance idealization to ensure that their children perpetuate their image. For a child to be perfect, he or she must have a perfect parent. You can see how both can become trapped in a cycle of idealization. What the child has projected on the parent (“My parent is a hero”), the parent then projects onto the child. This puts enormous external pressure on the child. It traps the child in an idealized version of what he or she really is, instead of releasing the child to experience failure and discover his or her own humanity and direction for life. As tempting as it is to idealize a child, unreflective parenting can create a story in the mind of the child that doesn’t exist. One where the parent doesn’t confront the child and hold him or her accountable.

That's especially true in families with successful businesses. Ultimately, founders must grapple with what they want for their children: Do you want your son to make you happy by being who you want him to be? Or do you want your daughter to be happy by being who she wants to be?

Parents who idealize their children risk raising entitled children. Think of *Tommy Boy*, the 1995 movie that chronicles the foibles of a socially and emotionally stunted successor (played by Chris Farley) following the sudden death of his industrialist father. Or any other comedic exaggeration of a successor. Depicted as entitled brats, they are emotional as well as social mutants. (Sometimes, they get their own reality shows.) The parents of such a brat spackle around the shortcoming of their parenting with the myth that they have raised a perfect child despite the flaws. However, children of parents who refuse to acknowledge their progeny's weaknesses fail to give their children what they really need—a strong sense of self. Idealization robs children of the opportunity to build self-esteem, which is constructed by coming up against barriers and overcoming them, by being held accountable, and by developing a realistic sense of who they are.

Eric Hoffer, an American moral and social philosopher, wrote in one of his notebooks on the effects of hothouse parenting, a phenomenon in which children are given endless attention by their parents. Though the parent's intent is to build self-esteem, it actually robs them of two foundational life skills: autonomy (self-governance and self-determination) and interdependence (collaboration and sharing with and real interest in others). Children, according to Hoffer, become "victims of the self-esteem trap." Parents who "make their children's needs the center of attention in every social setting" expect in return the reward of a "grown-up individual who is self-confident, empathic, loving, able to achieve whatever goals they set for themselves ... After all that parental sacrifice, according to the fictions, the children will be grateful and generous."

Hoffer concludes that sadly, "none of this works ... [because] idealization creates a home environment that cannot be reproduced in the real world. Instead of preparing our children to grow into confident and responsive adults, our unrealistic parenting leaves them mired in excessive self-concern, afraid of the challenges of adult life,

and feeling bad or even defective if they don't achieve exceptional status, wealth, or accomplishments by age 28 or so."²

As Massimo Ferragamo says, "The toughest thing for a parent is that you have to be unpopular in order to do them good." Protecting children from their shortcomings is a shortcoming of parenting. This type of idealization can be particularly devastating for a family business.

Parentification of the Child

Idealization can lead the family to parentify the successor. Parentification is when we place a successor into a position of authority without any background or experience to be successful in this position. Now, almost all successors stepping into a new leadership role are never fully prepared to take on that role—mainly because they haven't filled that role before. But they are often chosen to lead because they have a background and track record that indicates that they can take on the new challenge. However, when a successor is parentified, the successor is set up for failure. Parentification makes a 23-year-old president of a division of the company straight out of college, merely because he or she is a family member, not because of any experience or qualifications.

Parentification puts the successor in a position of knowing at some level that he or she is not credible. It simultaneously sabotages the successor's ability to build credibility because he or she isn't prepared to do the job. In the end, this reinforces the myth because inevitably, the parent/hero must swoop back in to save the day and correct the problems. But it does not position the family business for success across generations.

Infantalization of the Successor

Infantalization is the result of a psychological need in the family to continue to view the successor as a child and not a fully-grown adult. Families can do this in many ways. They underpay the next-generation leaders, keeping successors economically dependent on their

²Polly Young-Eisendrath, "How Well Meaning Parents Cheat Their Children of Self Confidence and Self Compassion," *Psychology Today* (Sept. 16, 2011).

parents. Afraid of successors using their authority, parents keep them in lower-level positions. They don't give honest feedback. Or don't hold their children accountable for performance. All of these things keep the successor in the shadow, stunting his or her growth as a generative leader.

To prepare successors for leadership, parents must guide their children through the turbulence of growing up, exposing them to hard realities while giving them a sense of place. The trick is to root them in reality rather than suspend them in a myth.

When Massimo Ferragamo's father died, his mother took on leadership of the business. As she fully dedicated herself to the company, she never neglected her family. Massimo credits his mother for the success of all of her children: "[She] was an oak tree, . . . letting a lot of sun and a lot of air pass through the branches, because she never did anything that was in any way impeding the growth of her sons or daughters."

If children do not have a mom (or dad) who lets the light in, they need someone to help them sort the ideal from the real. Growing into the most credible version of one's self demands bridging the gap between what is imagined and hoped for and what is true and possible. The transition from myth to reality is a transition from idealization to realization.

Idealization's Alter-Ego

The opposite of idealization is *devaluation*—the process of attributing exaggerated negative qualities to others. In many ways, devaluation is idealization's alter-ego. Both distort reality in order to make sense of a complicated reality. While idealization says the parent is all-powerful, able to solve and do anything, devaluation says the parent is a complete failure. Both help children to deal with a parent's failures (specifically, his or her mortality). In many ways, this is an attempt to differentiate. In some cases, devaluation helps children feel a sense of connection with their parent. The more human they make their parent, the more accessible they are. However, it becomes impossible to glimpse the good.

Peterson Construction was a household name in the Northeast. Bill Peterson started the company in 1960, after getting fired as a foreman from two other companies. With no college degree, but with a strong work ethic and a will to succeed, Bill built a \$200 million

company. The early years, however, required a great deal of sacrifice. Bill and his wife, Sharon, married shortly before they started the company in 1960 and put everything they had into the company: their money, their time, their energy, their souls. Their hard work paid off in many ways, most notably by enabling them to give the next generation whatever they needed.

While Bill Sr. was celebrated in the community for his success and contributions to the community, his son, Bill Jr., always battled with his father over the smallest issues. When he was young, it was about his allowance or curfew. When Bill Jr. entered the business, it was about budgets and how quickly Bill Jr. could advance in the company.

Bill Jr. had a long-standing resentment of his father for not being there as he was growing up. It felt to Bill like his father loved the business more than he loved his children. While the world around him saw his father as a powerful and generous man, Bill Jr. saw fault in almost everything his father did. Growing up, Bill Jr. filled his father's absence with the story that his dad was an uncaring person who was more interested in the glory of his next new building than the accomplishments or interests of his kids. Bill Jr. looked for any action that would confirm his story.

The story that Bill Jr. told himself prevented him from grasping that his father felt an enormous amount of guilt at being largely absent from his life while he was young. The resentment led Bill Jr. to rebuff his father's attempts to build a relationship with him in his teens and twenties. When Bill Jr. entered the business, their relationship worsened. Everything his father did that could be seen as harsh or uncaring was magnified. Any gesture of generosity or support was ignored.

Negative myths, like positive myths, similarly affect a successor's self-confidence and internal credibility. So engaged in the negative reaction, a child may develop a sense of victimhood. Devaluation is a fake form of differentiation. If a parent fails a child, the child expends enormous energy feeling angry at Dad rather than doing the hard work of developing internal and external credibility. Without internal credibility—a sense that he or she is meaningful and valuable—the successor can feel powerlessness over his or her problems. Creating an environment where the next generation feels entitled almost guarantees that they will feel like victims—that they have no control over their problems and deserve to be taken care of because of their last name.

Reality and True Truth

Myths and Mortals is not about failure, of course, it's about success. It's not about children climbing out of the mire of myths of their parents. It's about what makes the children of a legendary family in business build their sense of identity and establish credibility with family, employees, stakeholders, and media, and go on to become generative leaders. It is about the narrative of the successor and how they find themselves and a path to authentic leadership. Successors have to carve out their own handholds as they ascend the face of the mountain.

Every successor (and every person, for that matter) is born into a story that has been narrated collectively for many years before his or her arrival. Every person understands himself or herself in relation to these stories. The essence of right and wrong, what is valued, and how each person perceives reality is developed in relation to what is remembered and retold. The challenge is that these are stories. Though they are only perceptions of what happened, humans treat them as truth, as if they are really what happened. What exists today, however, in the here and now, are the *interpretations* of these stories. The temptation of family business successors is to tell the story of who they are in relation to the past, rather than tell new stories that portend the future. Successors who inspire others and grow stronger businesses understand that stories are merely stories. Such leaders seize the opportunity to write their own narrative while preserving the legacy of the founder.

When Salvatore Ferragamo passed away, he only produced ladies' shoes. But his dream was to create a house of luxury products, everything a man or woman would need from head to toe. Imagine if the Ferragamo children, the successors, remained stuck in the "Shoemaker of the Star" story. But the Ferragamo family wrote the second chapter of the Ferragamo story, extending the narrative Salvatore had begun. This time the story had a cast of heroes. The eldest sister introduced handbags; the second sister rolled out a ready-to-wear line; the third sister developed an accessories line, including men's ties and scarves; the second eldest brother launched a men's line. Behind the scenes, the eldest brother managed the finances and the youngest brother, Massimo, expanded the brand through advertising and marketing. All six children "pull[ed] in the same direction"—toward the dream of their father—but with

skills, passion, and confidence to write their own narrative within the organization. Writing the next chapter can be summed up in Massimo's advice to successors: "Know your measure, know your size, and know where you can improve." This is truth. This is reality. This is credibility.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? (carrying the name of those who went before)

The naming of children has always fascinated me. Succession in royal families has been built on family members being named after ancestors: King Henry VII, Queen Elizabeth II. In current day, this tradition carries on in many families where one child carries the name of their mythic parent or grandparent. We see it in the case of Wrigley, where Bill's full name is William Wrigley Jr. after his grandfather. While not a guarantee of success or failure of the successor, it does tie the successor tightly to the myth.

Carrying the name John Jr. or Edward III automatically invites comparison of the successor to the mythic family figure. It makes the process of differentiation even more challenging because it inherently sends a message of following in the father's footsteps. Specifically, carrying the moniker *Junior* can imply lesser than the parent. In these cases, it is even more important for both the successor and the parent to be vigilant in helping successors find space and distance to establish their own sense of identity and their own authentic leadership style.

CASE EXAMPLE: Karl-Erivan Haub, CEO of Tengelmann Group

"My son carries the same name as my father. We keep passing on the name, Karl-Erivan, Erivan Karl; so we keep switching that four or five generations now. So, now [people in the community] would know us because the name is not very common in Germany. And since you frequently read it in the paper, the next generation can have difficulties. . . . My son was once embarrassed by his teacher, by calling him out and talking about "your father: and the supermarket around the corner needs to be run better. Maybe your father invites me to run it."

Through no fault of his own, a young man in school, just trying to learn, is pulled into the story of the family business. Whether we like it or not, the shadow often follows us. It is for us to prepare successors to deal with these challenges.

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