

# Discuss the Undiscussabull™ - Tools for Talking About Tough Issues in Farm Transfer™

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## ■ Take Home Messages

- ▶ Build relational capital...what do you really want?
- ▶ Get out of the neutral zone, a place of high stress and anxiety. What do you need to begin?
- ▶ Understand the power of "WHY"...your intent. You can't read minds to know intent or effects of your actions.
- ▶ Discuss the undiscussabull™...tough issues. Make your own pack of cards,
  - ▶ one issue per index card. Use for family business meetings.
  - ▶ What is the one thing you need to talk about at your business but are avoiding?

## ■ Find Out Your Key Communication Style:

- ▶ Action people want directness and results orientation
- ▶ Process people want options, order, and not be rushed
- ▶ People styles want relationship building before business talk
- ▶ Ideas people want to tell you the big picture without interruption

## ■ Understand That Your Age Has Certain Tasks That If Frustrated Cause Conflict:

- ▶ Age 20...independence... the decade of making it
- ▶ Age 30...success, mastery...exhausted

- Age 40...taking charge...security, ownership and control
- Age 50...quality of life issues...simplify, competency
- Age 60...legacy, starting over...future income streams, health
- Age 70...mentoring...meaningful life
- Age 80...elderhood, blessing....deal with death
- Age 90...hand it all over

## ■ **Why Folks Won't Talk About The Undiscussabulls™:**

- scared
- last great idea was shot down
- emotional bank account is dry
- self worth is based on action or net worth
- timing is different
- avoid conflict at all costs

## ■ **What's Your Conflict Style?**

- avoidance
- accommodating
- competing
- compromising
- collaborating

Is the resistance coming from the head, heart or gut? Understanding, emotion or trust issues?

## ■ **Tools for Discussing the Undiscussabull™...the Tough Issues:**

### 1. **Take CHARGE...The Bull by the Horns**

- Take responsibility for changing you. Only you change you.
- Change is inevitable, but growth is optional.
- Timeliness is key...greater options if time is with you.

## **2. Come From Curiosity**

- I'm curious about...don't be judgmental or defensive.
- Identify your conflict style and possible triggers. Control anger.
- Seed common ground and "make a request".
- Clarify, seek information, do reality checking, brainstorm and move from positions to interest...What is important to you about that?

## **3. Ask Deeply**

- Balance the speaking and listening...ask open-ended questions
- Explain, describing your own feelings and interests
- Be soft on the person and hard on the problem...just like toilet paper!

## **4. Play with Possibility**

- Use a talking stick, have family biz meetings.
- Avoid the downward spiral...be positive
- Don't pre-judge other's goals and dreams

## **5. Really LISTEN. "When I Listen, People Talk."**

- Build understanding through checking out assumptions
- Explore interests and feelings
- Guess what is motivating the other person.
- Check out [thinkingforresults.com](http://thinkingforresults.com)

## **6. Ponder and Perk Not Prod**

- Digest, sift, and give yourself space and time to think.
- Consider the other's perspective.
- Ask "is there anything else?"
- Is that right?

## **7. Cultivate Trust**

- Build confidence in the relationship
- Walk your talk, accountability
- Culture of fairness, respect, commitment

## 8. Respect Boundaries

- ▶ Clear roles...dad or boss? Family or business role?
- ▶ Guidelines for performance, jobs.
- ▶ Be clear about expectations
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Cut gossip

## 9. We All End Up in a Box.

- ▶ Death will happen, come to terms with life, plan for it!
- ▶ Face the aging process...sustain emotional & physical health
- ▶ Reconsider your future

## 10. Extend the Olive Branch.

- ▶ Create the legacy of open communication and relationship
- ▶ Forgiveness to be able to move forward
- ▶ Pass on authority and learn to let go.

## ■ Effective Family Business Meetings: **REGULAR, on the Calendar!**

- ▶ Talking stick and stress squeeze toys
- ▶ Undiscussabull™ cards.on index cards
- ▶ Guidelines for respect
- ▶ White board agenda collector
- ▶ Binder for advisor input
- ▶ Notes with timelines for action and emails
- ▶ Reading lists
- ▶ Conflict resolution course graduates

Many farm families are feeling a deep sense of guilt knowing they should be having business meetings, but they just don't seem to get around to it. The key factor is understanding why you need to meet.

- ▶ Family council to explore how the family operates
- ▶ Succession planning

- ▶ Estate planning: wills, inheritance, fairness issues, legacy plans
- ▶ Advisers and suppliers meetings
- ▶ Human resources, operations etc.

Think about whose mouth needs to be moving at each type of meeting. Daughter-in-laws are typically silent when they want to avoid conflict, and don't feel their voice counts. Son-in-laws may be the joint successors, and they also see the meeting process differently because their "fresh eyes" come from a different family style of communication. The other mouths you may or may not want to have open are the common in law partners of your farming children. Canadian law treats them as if "they were married" if they have lived together long enough. I treat partners and the in-laws as key players in the communication dynamic, and welcome them to voice their opinions at the meeting...with civility.

Is the meeting to navigate a family council for how you celebrate as a family? This meeting includes all family members whether they farm with you or not. I know a family that meets annually with the farming and non-farm children to talk about the family vision and how the farm is doing. The non-farm kids use this as a chance to encourage the parents to let go of control, and applaud the efforts of the farming siblings. Go to [www.farmcentre.com](http://www.farmcentre.com) to order a copy of "Managing the Multi-generational farm" which is a great tool for distinguishing between a family council and a farm business meeting. It also helps for developing your family code of conduct.

Is the meeting to plan for the transfer of the business to the successor? This is a succession meeting and key players are the founders, successors, and their spouses or partners. The non-farm heirs don't need to be part of the initial succession planning meetings, but it is a good idea to include them in the communication loop as agreements are being reached. There seems to be a strong sense of entitlement in the country by non-farm heirs who believe they have a right to quota, cows and land! As a farm communication succession coach I typically have conversations with all the children and include them in the initial key family meeting, so that they have a clear understanding of their parent's intentions. Many folks can live with tough decisions when they clearly understand the "why" behind the decision.

Succession planning is a long process. One dairy family has the succession meeting monthly, which is different than the monthly operational meeting. Agenda items are collected on a white board in the barn office, and the administration officer farm family member keeps track of hot issues to discuss. Minutes of the meetings are emailed to all participants.

All family members need to have a voice in the estate planning meeting, as this is where the issue of fairness and inheritance expectations can be voiced.

Ultimately the founders decide what they want for their estate plan, yet they will have a keen sense of what their children are feeling if the meeting gives everyone a voice. As a coach, I receive the minutes of the meetings to track the progress of the decision making and keep all parties accountable to act.

Another important meeting for grooming your successors is to include them in the meetings with your ag. lenders, accountants, and lawyers. Suppliers also appreciate developing a relationship with the next generation. I typically don't meet with the equipment dealers, but when we are spending 6 figures on new iron I appreciate an informal update and expense justification from my spouse. It is a sign of respect for my partnership in the marriage and the farm business. (Read more about the women's need to know at my blog "I'd just like to know...at [www.elainefroese.com](http://www.elainefroese.com))

When you are encouraging mouths to open at your farm business meetings, you need to set down guidelines for respectful communication. An agenda before the meetings helps everyone prepare their thoughts. A talking stick, like my Beanie Baby® OX helps the holder speak their mind without interruption. The Ox is passed to the person who requests it, and all others listen.

Dr. David Kohl of Virginia Tech had a grad student discover that in over 400 farms across 6 states, the farm families that had regular farm business meetings were 21% more profitable. Communication that resolves conflict, deals with the people issues and pays attention to the financials of your operation is a wonderful thing.

I challenge you to see where your resistance to opening your mouth is coming from. Is it your head not understanding the legal jargon or tax implications? It is perfectly fine to admit that you don't understand, or need another explanation that makes better sense to you. Is it your heart making you feel sad about letting go of power and control? Or is your heart aching to find out what your daughter in law really feels about the family, but you are not at the point of trust yet, where she is willing to open up to you? Is it your gut, your intuition guiding you with the impression that you just have to face your fears and do the meetings anyway?

Farm families can't always manage meetings well on their own. That's why the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors directory exists to help you find a facilitator to guide your discussions ([www.cafanet.com](http://www.cafanet.com)) I attend meetings in person, on the speaker phone, and sometimes on SKYPE.

My bias is to include all the family as much as possible. One family who tried to meet without the spouses ended up with a huge conflict, and a tape recorder at the table held by an angry successor who refused to talk if he could not "tape for his wife".

Decide why you need to meet. Meet regularly with great openness and a spirit of curiosity to find out what the other person is thinking and feeling, without judgment. I tend to be more inclusive of all family members, because I strongly feel that we all have communication filters, and it is easier for everyone to hear the message firsthand, than have it translated later by a biased farming spouse.

The best feeling in the world is to have your intentions clearly understood with the love and respect of the entire family wanting to make changes for the betterment of all parties. Open mouths that resolve conflict respectfully are very freeing tools that you need to add to your business toolbox.

## ■ References:

Froese, Elaine (2010) “Do the Tough Things Right...how to prevent communication disasters in family business.”

[www.cafanet.com](http://www.cafanet.com) Canadian Association of Farm Advisors

[www.elainefroese.com](http://www.elainefroese.com) Check here for recent articles to encourage your family. Buy a copy of Elaine’s new action guide or a CD of Ten Tools for Talking about Tough Issues.

[www.farmcentre.com](http://www.farmcentre.com) Canadian Farm Business Management Council Elaine’s webinars are archived on this site. Go to the Agri-webinar archives. [http://www.agriwebinar.com/archive\\_login.php](http://www.agriwebinar.com/archive_login.php)

[www.hudsoninstitute.com](http://www.hudsoninstitute.com) Coaching Website

[www.smartfarmbc.ca/succession-planning](http://www.smartfarmbc.ca/succession-planning). This BC Agriculture site has video footage of Elaine in action doing a seminar on “Who Gets the Farm and When?” so you can share the message with your family.

