

LARGE FAMILY MICROCOSM SHEDS LIGHT ON ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

By Carol Bergeron



People are often curious about what it was like growing up in a large family. Before a few historical tidbits, here is some perspective: my family had a 1 to 1 ratio of girls to boys, about an 18 year age span between the oldest and youngest and I am the 5th in the 8 kid line up. Don't worry, this will connect to practices of successful organizations.

What were vacations like? The beach was where we relaxed and recharged. Envision 8 kids and 2 adults all piling into a mammoth station wagon (named "the tank" because of its lovely olive green color) with 3 trunks of stuff strapped to the roof. Highlights? body surfing, sun bathing, fishing, biking, boardwalk strolling, card playing and of course eating ice cream. The beach location changed over the years but the traditions we grew fond of did not.

The holidays? Every year when Dad muttered he'd be pulling the artificial tree out of storage, we raced out to buy a freshly cut one (funded by Mom of course). Christmas rituals included mass, name exchange gifts, wacky gag gifts with the addition of the Yankee Gift Swap, playing games, going to the movies and fine dining. If you didn't cook then you did the dishes while singing the "Slithery Dee" (Smothers Brothers ring a bell?). Top that off with cookies galore, all homemade and dee-lish.

Core values? You bet. They supported our goals and guided our day to day actions. The biggies included family, faith, health, education, work ethic and good sportsmanship.

Education included not just academics but life skills too. My parents, god bless them, taught us life skills complete with on the job training opportunities (i.e. the weekly chores list posted on the frig). Development programs? Absolutely, there was the Babysitter In Residence Program, the Culinary Institute, Spic and Span Seminars, Shop Class for the basics in home repair and the Green Thumb Lawn & Gardening School. Performance feedback was abundant given the built in coaches of all ages.

Relationships grew richer when adapting together. We moved from time to time. Imagine the first week in our new digs. It's late July, the temperature skyrocketed into the upper 90s, humidity off the chart, no AC, windows opened for ventilation as a warm breeze flowed from the cow pasture across the street into the house. Our moves took place during the summer so as not to interrupt the school year - pro. Tough time to make new friends when school was out of session - con. The pungent aroma of fresh cow droppings – very big con. During these times we depended on each other for support, fun and friendship.

Today our family is much larger. We span 5 generations (Vets, Boomers and Gen X, Y and Z). Despite the miles between us we celebrate a lot. This year started off with a nephew's safe return from his 2nd tour in Afghanistan followed by the addition of two

Routing List

great grandchildren, a niece's high school graduation, her older sister's wedding, 3 milestone birthdays (at last count), promotions and relocations. And we are only half way through the year. Hallmark has fared well on our dime.

So, what insight can be drawn from my microcosm of large family life? Healthy culture and environment, reflected in day to day experiences, makes a difference in terms of individual and collective confidence and success. Oh, did I mention that my sibs and I all turned out fine? Well with the exception ofoh, never mind.

Whether you are talking about a large family or a company, culture is a complex mix of: leadership style often expressed in terms of core values, goals and expectations and most importantly action; deliberately adopted rituals and traditions; practices that informally emerged over time; the ways people choose to get things get done like making decisions and resolving conflict; the experiences that people have and share with others; and the multi dimensional relationships that help people relate to one another and adapt to change because "we are all in this together".

As a leader, when's the last time you took stock of your culture? How does it stack up with what you want it to be? Is it easy to get the right things done in your environment? If not, what steps will you take to change it?

I leave you with my **Top Ten Tips for Thriving in a Large Family:**

10. It pays to be on time for dinner since he (or she) who eats the fastest gets the most.
9. Bake sale duty? Score points with the sibs by baking a 2nd batch for the home team.
8. Never leave chocolate chip cookie dough unattended.
7. Talk up your family's Temp Agency with neighbors. And dash to a ringing phone because it could be a college fund donor in search of baby-sitting, house-sitting or lawn care services.
6. When playing Monopoly, play to win (once opponents catch a whiff of vulnerability then you are toast).
5. When Dad says the tank leaves at 8, believe him.
4. Reserve weekend use of the car in advance AND write it on the calendar.
3. Don't even think about returning with the gas tank on empty.
2. Get out of town Saturday night to avoid "American Chop Suey" (a unique blend of the entire week's leftovers conveniently reheated in one pot).
1. ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS lock the bathroom door when in use.

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