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Bringing More To The Table

Younger Generations
Urged To Broaden Horizons

Plus: The Demise Of Saltus Press: What Happened

A Supplement to Banker & Tradesman



The Piantedosi family is charting a career course for fourth-generation family members for the mutual benefit of both the people and the business, which includes outside experience. Pictured from left are: Tom Piantedosi, president and CEO; Bob Piantedosi, senior vice president of production operations; Adam Piantedosi, manager in training, and Joseph Piantedosi Jr., executive vice president of marketing and business development.

Experience Wanted

Younger Generation Urged to Broaden Horizons When Committing to Family Business

By Christina P. O'Neill

Joseph Piantedosi Jr. was newly graduated from Boston College in 1983 and attending a football game at his old high school when a former classmate asked him, "Do you still work for your father, or did you get a real job?" The question "hit me like a jolt," he says.

Its implications were that younger-generation members of family businesses join because they can't compete in the job world – or that they are trying to avoid doing so. That's unhealthy for the younger generation and particularly unhealthy for the business. Joe Jr., now executive vice president of marketing and business development at the Piantedosi Baking Company, a commercial bakery based in Malden, has seen it happen at other family-owned companies. He and his third-generation brethren have been determined not to let it happen at the company his grandfather had started in 1916.

Piantedosi Baking Company has changed greatly over the last generation. When Joe Jr. joined the company fulltime in 1982, it had less than 100 employees, including about eight other third-generation family employees, and did about \$13 million in sales. He and the other two owners embarked on a 25-year initiative to grow the business and shrink the number of non-active stockholders. "All of a sudden, we became a real company," he says. Today, the company has sales of about \$40 million, and 250 employees.

When the oldest of the fourth generation was still in his infancy, the third-generation Piantedosis – Tom, president and CEO, Joe Jr., and Robert, senior vice president of operations – started developing an entry plan for their kids. It was never written down, but it emphasized the importance of outside experience as a requirement for those who choose to join the family firm. It's in beta test mode with Joe Jr.'s nephew Adam, now 23 and a manager in training.

The plan: Once generation four graduates from college or other post-secondary schooling, they are to work somewhere else for two years. It's subject to adjustment as needed but the goals remain the same: Broaden your horizons so you can bring something of value to the company.

"We are working on trying to figure out what direction we want to take the company," Adam says. "As a member of a new generation, I want to try to grow the company in the right direction for the future and leave my mark with the rest of the fourth generation."

Giving People the Option

Adam is the son of CEO Thomas Piantedosi. He graduated from Fairfield University in Connecticut in 2009 with a degree in psychology, and took the summer off. After that, his preferred options were to go back to graduate school, get a job, or get a short-term certificate as a personal trainer. He got the trainer's certificate, but decided he wanted to work, not go to grad school – at least not in psychology.

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Experience Wanted

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Experiences working the front desk for a summer left him curious about the business. Then, in college, he received a carton of fresh bread every week (with the company name on the box, of course) to distribute on campus. “I became the bread guy,” he says – and the concept took on a life of its own. “The popularity of the bread and the passion that people had for it, whether it was at college or while I was working here for that summer made me really appreciate the business,” he says. His school had an intramural softball team in which the players wore Piantedosi Baking Co. T-shirts as their uniforms. “This happened from people simply trying our bread and loving it and seeing me wear some of our T-shirts. ... There is a social experience around bread.”

So, six months after graduation, Adam talked to his father. Options for work were limited in the difficult economy, so his father invited him in – but the third generation told him, in effect, that there would be a quiz. A big one.

The plan for Adam was that he would come in on a temporary basis to learn. Today, he has just come off a six-month rotation in production. He was tasked with looking at his work environment as a manager would see it. That’s not the same as acting like a manager before the time is right. “The rotation is important,” Joe Jr. says. “We have long-time employees here. Adam needs to gain their respect. He needs to come in and get dirty, to do things our generation did when our dads were here.”

While both Joe Jr. and Adam say they never felt pressured to join the company, Joe Jr. likens joining a family business to an arranged marriage, except that his father had urged him not to do it, but to get a law degree instead. He demurred, but says, “I think it’s so important to give people the option.” Adam says, “I think that deciding on my own and coming in when I was ready has been a positive for me.”

Adam will do rotations in through all aspects of operations, administration and compliance. His plan: He’s currently studying for the GMAT and plans to apply to Northeastern University for the start of next fall, after having learned most aspects of the business. Northeastern’s work co-op program is a draw for him. Sales will be his last rotation segment. “It’s not going to be a cakewalk, let me tell you that,” Joe Jr. says.

Making it on the Outside

There’s no one way to get outside experience, says David Karofsky. While some family business consultants say getting outside experience first is ideal, the economy doesn’t

always cooperate. That’s what happened with Adam. “They brought him in, but didn’t give him a leather seat and a nice office,” says Karofsky, who is acting as Adam’s executive coach, helping him to refine the rotation program, which Karofsky says is completely the brainchild of the Piantedosi family.



Cady Zildjian Bickford, New Business Development Coordinator

“Typically, we encourage the younger generation to go out and get work experience prior to joining the family business,” Karofsky says. “First, we want the next generation to bring focus and expertise, but we also want to make sure that the next-generation family member has experience they can use inside the business or outside experience in case the company decides to sell.”

That’s not the case at Piantedosi, says Joe Jr. “Bringing the fourth generation in telegraphs that we’re not interested in selling the company.”

David Karofsky, Adam Piantedosi’s mentor, joined his father, Paul Karofsky, in the business consulting sphere after 15 years of outside experience. “It’s great to learn what it’s like to have a boss who’s not your uncle, not your father, not your mother,” he says. He advises that the outside experience does not have to be in the same industry, as long as the skills are transferable.

The next two people are examples of those who are using their portable skills, developed somewhere else, to help their parents’ businesses.

Not Your Father’s Company

Molly Brodeur didn’t join her father’s business until she was 32, in 2006, picking up 14 years of experience in the financial industry and media, working for WBZ radio. Al Brodeur opened his eponymous company, Al Brodeur’s Auto Body Inc., in Marlboro in 1970, and has been at its current location since 1984. Molly plans to take over the business when Al, a fourth-generation small-business owner, retires. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were dairy farmers in town.

“My father saw the writing on the wall and knew [the dairy business] was not going to last,” she says.

Now, the auto body business is grappling with its own economic challenges. For years, Massachusetts auto insurance rules have kept the reimbursement rate for labor far below the cost to maintain a growing independent business. Auto dealers can subsidize their in-house body shops with other sales and services, but the independent collision shops don’t have that option. The result: Small shops often can’t afford or don’t have access to the technology needed to fix today’s cars. But Al Brodeur was never one to give up, says Molly Brodeur. She uses her marketing and communications experience to advocate for shifting the control of where auto body work is done from the insurer to the customer. Her trade group, the Automotive Alliance of Service Providers of Massachusetts, will refile a bill to that effect this coming January. Her father, she says, has spent the last 25 years trying to make the industry better, and his never-give-up attitude has been an inspiration to her.

Around the time she decided to join her father’s business, Molly decided it would be in the shop’s best interest for her to get a business degree. She chose Becker College’s accelerated adult program, earning her bachelors in business in three years. “That experience was invaluable,” she says. “Most of the professors are adjunct faculty; they’re out in the business world and bring that experience to the classroom, and all my peers were working adults. I learned a lot from the professors and my classmates.”

Skills You Can Take With You

Cady Zildjian Bickford also took a circuitous route to joining the family firm. Yes, *that* Zildjian – the fourteen-generation cymbal maker with international recognition, the company now based in Norwell, with 150 employees and about 600 SKUs for cymbals. Cady’s aunt is the CEO and her mother heads human resources. A long-standing family requirement is that incoming younger-generation members had to get outside experience first. The criteria are broad, she says – three to five years’ experience in some field that relates to the business in some way, with management experience a key component. In her case, that was customer service, a portable skill that transcends many industries.

Bickford is a horseback rider by avocation. Her job choice out of college was a then-startup company called SmartPak in Plymouth, which initially specialized in equine nutritional supplements and medications, but which has expanded its products and services to a wider segment of the equine market, as well as catering to the show dog market.

Bickford graduated from college in 2002 and joined SmartPak in 2003. That company has been named twice to *Inc.* magazine's Fastest Growing Companies list and operates a retail store in Natick. Bickford spent nearly four years in customer service, as product manager and account manager.

Customer service is a big part of Zildjian's business, as it was at SmartPak. "I won't forget my first boss at SmartPak," Bickford says. "If someone was unhappy with the service, the boss said, to impress people, you never come to the boss with a problem – you come with a solution."

One of her cousins is finishing a course of study at Babson Business School and will start work next summer at an independent brand-

ing consulting firm. "There's no pressure to join the company," Bickford says. "It's all on us. ... It's a privilege to work here – you're not entitled to it just because you were born [a Zildjian]."

Prior Experience a Prerequisite

Entry programs, however they're done, are of vital importance, says Pat Frischkof. She and her husband Paul are family business consultants who have helped their clients all across the country develop entry plans. "I think businesses should hire insiders the same way they hire outsiders, but they don't do that," she says. "They don't say, 'we have a need in purchasing, accounting or sales' ... and target family members who meet those criteria. You

end up with a lot of mishmash and not really well-matching skill sets [to] what positions where young people are taught."

Pat Frischkof says she and Paul do see economic pressures as keeping some younger-generation family members close to home in the current economy, but they, like David Karofsky, emphasize the need for the younger generation to develop portable skills – whether inside or outside the family business. If the family business is a bad fit or they don't like it, "they have something to fall back on. If the situation doesn't work out for them and the business fails or is sold, they can be in a real tough strait if the only reference they've got is a relative. It's extremely difficult to work anywhere else." ■

Five Generations, Many Different Paths

For those who maintain that there is no single correct way to do an entry plan, let us now present the Woodman family, proprietors of Woodman's of Essex.

Founded in 1914, Woodman's is a family-owned restaurant and catering business, now in its fifth generation, with two locations – its main facility in the North Shore town of Essex and an establishment in Litchfield, NH, acquired in 2009. Woodman's has about 80 year-round employees and up to 200 in the 16-week summer season. Its present management team includes third- and fourth-generation family members. Woodman's has become a part of the culture of Essex, and has been described by Zagat's Restaurant Guide as "an American cult classic." The business is inextricably intertwined with the family that created and sustains it.

There's a saying: "Normal" is what you grew up with." Woodman family members started their work life at the restaurant at a young age, learned many skills early in life, and worked hard to earn the trust of the older generation. "Most of these kids are phenomenal multi-taskers, by luck or by environment," says Maureen Woodman. "The



The fifth generation of the Woodman family, age range 1 year to 26, many of whom are already working at the restaurant.

older people were willing to trust our kids. We weren't afraid to put them on the register, or anywhere else, because they just knew how to do it."

At the urging of second-generation Virginia Woodman, all of her seven children got their postsecondary education in subjects that would be pertinent to the business. Two third-generation co-chairs, Stephen Woodman and Douglas Woodman, who shoulder

the fiscal responsibility in addition to several other areas of talent and expertise, now lead the company. A non-family comptroller, Carolyn Gourdeau, who joined the company 13 years ago through a bout of expansion, supports them. Rhonda Woodman, director of marketing, says Gourdeau's outsider's perspective has become a valuable part of the company's continued success.

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