

The Top Ten Truths Revealed

A Reflection from Clemens Ast

For the past 30 plus years I have worked closely with individuals, families, and businesses to help them discover and define their dreams, aspirations, and goals. The journey to fulfillment, growth, and simple survival is no easy task. The struggle and pain experienced along the way is often offset with accomplishment and joy. I have observed that when an individual and the family continue to be committed to each other and are steadfast in resolving issues in order to benefit the whole, they always find their way through the confusion and turmoil.

I have often thought that I have been both blessed and cursed in my profession and calling. The blessings are many because of the wonderful people I have met and worked with over the years. They have taught me many powerful lessons and have confirmed my belief in the goodness and value of life and people. I have admired their courage to persist in tough times and their love and commitment to their families, employees, customers, vendors, and communities. The curse comes in the form of seeing the same behaviors that create negative outcomes repeat themselves in numerous family businesses. The fact that we have seen families in business go through the struggle and make the changes necessary to get positive results while others, who I care deeply about, choose to not make the commitments necessary to embrace the struggle required to get positive results, is painful. I often wonder how many times I have failed to heed another's wise advice and continued to struggle with my own issues while others waited patiently and with love until I found my way.

I have been discovering that there are essential truths that are shared by many of us who are on this journey we all call "life". Our average life expectancy in America is anywhere between 78 and 85 years depending on gender and other factors. We should ask ourselves questions regarding not only longevity, but quality of life. For example; What are the elements for living a happy and fulfilling life? How do we each define "success"? Why do some people seem to struggle and wind up in depression and severe anxiety, while others with even greater struggles become stronger, kinder, and humbler? What is the difference? Why do some family businesses successfully pass from one generation to the next while the majority get stuck and fail to succeed? What are the keys to family business sustainability and healthy family relationships.

Sustaining a family business is difficult and challenging. Family dynamics, along with great uncertainty and change in the marketplace, make it an overwhelming task. Perpetuating privately held businesses is essential to the continued welfare and health of our society. Family businesses are the backbone of our economy and of the communities in which they are located and those they serve from afar. There is no greater calling than working to maintain and grow a business that generates income, jobs, and security for



individuals, families, customers, and the communities served. Business' primary purpose is to serve others and is, therefore, a noble calling.

Following are the ten most essential truths that I have discovered over the past 30 to 40 years while working with literally hundreds of companies and thousands of people.

Truth # 1:

Each of us has been created with special gifts and unique abilities. We are all called to make a difference in the world. Self-awareness along with a belief and trust in ourselves and in a higher purpose can provide the fuel and energy for embracing the struggle we all experience in our life's journey. Therefore our first task is to know and understand ourselves. Our journey begins within our own being. We must accept individual responsibility for our own happiness and success or lack thereof.

Truth # 2:

As an individual, we never achieve greatness on our own. Our value and worth is ultimately determined by the good we bring to others. We grow in relation to our openness, involvement, and interaction with others. Families are the most influential unit and often essential for creating a nurturing environment for each of us to grow and flourish. However, not everyone is blessed with a nurturing nuclear family and must look to the extended family and the family of affinity to find support and positive reinforcement. We all have a responsibility to each other to be kind, loving and helpful if we are to achieve greatness. Spouses, business partners, employees, and customers play an important and essential role in helping us find balance and enabling us to reach our fullest potential.

Truth # 3:

There are no accidents. We are all connected and everything happens for a reason. We are a part of a world community made up of people like ourselves who have fears, anxieties, and doubts, as well as hopes and dreams. Being separate yet connected is necessary for building healthy families and businesses. Our willingness to be vulnerable and humble is true leadership. Humility and trust enable each of us to flourish as we deal with the struggles and pain in our own lives as well as the lives of others.

Truth # 4:

Sorrow and struggle are a part of human existence. We cannot run away from it nor will we ever find our lives without pain. In a strange sort of way, sorrow and pain become blessings. In sorrow we often find joy, in struggle we find strength, and in the pain we discover relief. The journey often provides us with a greater understanding and meaning for our lives. Within all of us we have the power and the courage to accomplish great



things. In order to do so, we must embrace change and the challenges attached to it so we can discover greater fulfillment and possibilities.

Truth # 5:

We live in an era of unlimited potential and opportunity. Today we hear a lot about the depletion of our natural resources and the shortage of manpower. There is an ever widening chasm between the haves and the have nots. The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. How do we turn the tide? The fact is that we have barely scratched the surface of our greatest capital sources; namely, our human, intellectual, social, and spiritual capital. We are beginning to acknowledge that there is tremendous value to be attached to the intangible and invisible elements of our lives. The human, intellectual, social, and spiritual capital that is inherent in all of us is now beginning to be more fully recognized and appreciated. Imagination, creativity, and innovation are our most prized resources. New understanding of concepts such as complex adaptive systems, chaos theory, emergence, systems thinking, spiral dynamics, and positive psychology are being discussed and applied in ever greater frequency and with great success. Each of us owns the capital assets necessary to make a real difference in improving the lives of others and therefore our own lives. We must find educational and work environments that will help us discover, nurture, and cultivate our unique abilities and talents.

Truth # 6:

We find clarity and meaning about ways to serve others by going deeper within ourselves. Each of us needs to find ways to reduce and eliminate the noise and clutter and discover the value of silence and reflection. In quietude will we discover our passion and be able to hear the voice of our soul. We will see more clearly our goodness and the special gifts we have to offer to the world to make it a better place. This truth requires a commitment from ourselves, as individuals, to embrace the concept of our value and worth and to persist and persevere until we know what it is and how to apply it for the betterment of others.

Truth # 7:

Trust and respect for others is essential in order to advance and perpetuate the human community. They are required for family businesses and communities to survive and grow. As we journey through life, we see that we are all connected and continue to evolve. It is not a matter of fixing people but a matter of knowing how to anticipate and respond to situations. In order to advance relationships we must act in an ever caring and loving manner.



Truth # 8:

Sustainability is more important than succession. In family businesses we have heard a lot about succession and finding the person or persons who can succeed us. This is an important factor, yet it will not be successful unless the family or organization has created a culture and structure that is sustainable. We must be able to adapt to changes and to have the patience to build and cultivate a sustainable environment. An attitude of stewardship and a vision that takes a 100 year or more long view can be helpful in creating perpetuity. Values and principles become the bedrock for enduring from generation to generation.

Truth # 9:

The most important assets are the human, intellectual, social, and spiritual capital. These are the intangible assets that create the tangible financial and physical capital. Defining and recognizing our capital assets opens the door to unlimited possibilities. The invisible assets are all tied to building relationships. Building relationships and community requires understanding, connectedness, inclusion, and communication. It is a valuable truth for advancing goodness and success.

Truth # 10:

Structure and systems play a vital role in the perpetuation of an organization. Structures and systems respond to the overarching shared vision, values and needs of the entity. Clarity of roles and responsibilities along with definition of sub-structures and boundaries are required. Connecting, sharing, inclusiveness, and participation are all essential elements of holding human organizations together. Channels of ongoing dialog are the life blood of an organization and determine its direction. By creating a business system with a heart and soul we are much more likely to attract and retain people who are loyal and productive.

Tool Crib:

Healthy systems need nourishment, exercise, and vitamins. Various tools serve as “vitamins” and aid in keeping the organization healthy and active. Examples of tools and aids include the following:

Strategic Thinking and Planning – Appreciative Inquiry – Self, Family, and Business Assessments – Owners Manuals and Owners Plans – Family Council – Career Development – Philanthropy – Spiral Dynamics – Holons – Theory U – Conditions of Change – Complex Adaptive Systems – Communications Planning – Coaching – Family Counseling – Leadership Development – Balanced Score Card – Boards of Directors – Estate and Financial Planning – Wealth Management

