

Are You Feeling Left Out of An Ag Legacy?

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Sandra sat in her usual chair at the table. Drank the same dark coffee from the same coffee cup and could almost quote her Dad as he talked about how things were going on the farm. He talked about the past year, increasing crop prices and the new tractor they just bought. He praised her brother as he always did, for his efforts in the feedlot and changing the crop rotation to increase forage production. He even mentioned the vacation that they were all able to take over the winter. The first time in a long time that they had been able to get away.

What he didn't mention was her efforts to balance the books and to keep them in the black. It hadn't been easy. She was no accountant but she worked hard and had been forced to learn on her feet to keep everything straight, as well as make sense of the many operations they had going. Between the feedlot, the dairy, and the field crops, it was a lot to keep track of. She had discovered several ways to help cut costs and that really boosted their cash flow. Her contributions were also a big reason they were able to take that vacation.

She knew he didn't do it intentionally. Managing the books was never something he did. Mom had always done that. Dad had seemingly overlooked it even more, since she passed away five years ago. Sandra had invested a great deal of time over the last three years trying to straighten it all out. Mom had done a good job but she also didn't have any training and wasn't always able to keep everything straight.

Would it kill Dad to take the time to notice and acknowledge her effort as part of the family farm operation? Probably not. Why did it seem like he went out of his way to take no notice of her contributions?

Feeling left out?

It is common to have the feeling of being left out. Whether it's feeling left out of a conversation, an important decision, not getting to play as many minutes on the basketball team or eating alone.

There are also times that you or others feel left out of decisions and activities in the family business and, consequently, the family's Ag Legacy.

Maybe it's the son who moved away to college but now feels he is no longer involved in decisions about the future of the family ranch. It might be a daughter who feels like she is never consulted about decisions on the farm, while her Dad and brother talk about it all the time. It could be the son-in-law who feels like he isn't welcome on the ranch, though he and his wife made sacrifices to move back to the area in order to help more.

Emotions

Emotions are real and feelings of being left out is a real emotion that can influence personal interactions, despite the fact that we often avoid talking about or addressing emotions directly. Psychologist Paul Eckman identified six basic emotions that he suggested were universally experienced in all human cultures.



These include:

1. Happiness
2. Sadness
3. Disgust
4. Fear
5. Anger
6. Surprise

This has become one of the more well-known theories, although others also exist. He later expanded his list to include things such as pride, shame, embarrassment, and excitement.

Psychologist Robert Plutchik proposed a Wheel of Emotions that works something like a color wheel. Here, emotions can be combined to form different feelings, much like colors can be mixed to create other shades (Cherry, 2021). It works by using the basic emotions as building blocks to create the more complex or mixed emotions we all experience at times. We likely can all agree that emotions are complicated and expressing them can be even more so.

Identifying emotions is one thing. Talking about them openly, especially within the culture of an agricultural family, can be difficult to say the least. Randy Weigel, former Extension Specialist, stated that the masculine identity generated by news media, artists, teachers, historians, parents, and public figures dominates how men think about themselves (Weigel). This makes men less likely to seek help, to be willing to talk about how they feel or to express their frustrations. In turn, other family members are also less likely to talk about their emotions or how the actions of others are affecting them. This can lead to denial or covering-up emotions and feelings within the family.

*The feeling
is often the
deeper truth,
the opinion
the more
superficial one.*

Augustus William Hare

Validation

How do families break the stigma that often exists around discussing and expressing emotions? How can families be more encouraging and supportive when family members struggle with emotions, such as feeling left out?

Emotional validation involves understanding and showing acceptance for another person's feelings. People who receive this type of validation are likely to feel that their emotions are not only seen and heard, but also that these feelings are accepted (Salters, 2021). This can help combat feelings of isolation or being left out.

Salters describes the benefits of validating another person's emotions:

1. Communicating acceptance: You show others that you care about and accept them for who they are when you validate someone's emotions (Wojnarowska, 2020).
2. Strengthening relationships: People who show each other acceptance are able to feel more connected and build stronger relationships.
3. Showing value: You reveal to others that they are important to you when you validate their emotions.
4. Better emotional regulation: It can help reduce the intensity of strong emotions when people feel that others hear and understand them. This can be particularly important when it comes to strong negative or

feelings of distress. Some researchers suggest that offering people emotional validation may help them better regulate their emotions (Herr, 2015).

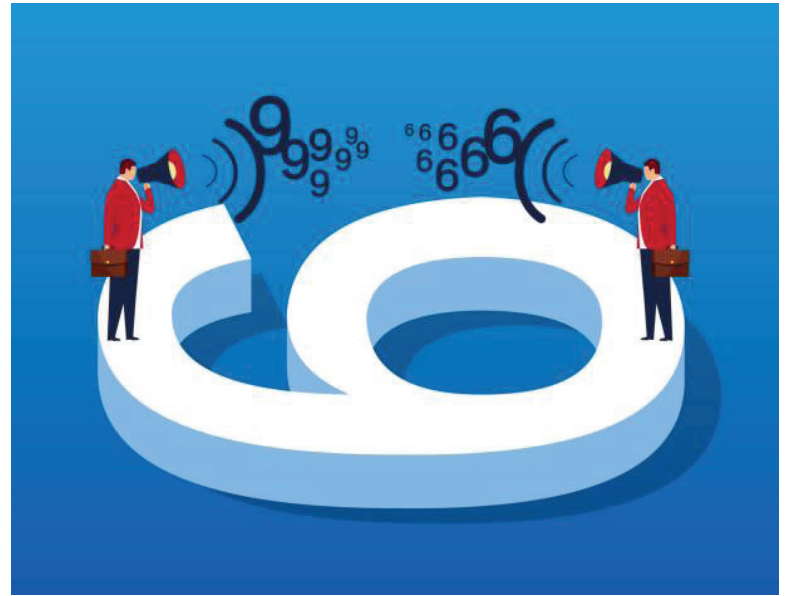
Validating emotions that someone else is experiencing does not mean that you share the same emotions or that you agree with them. Nor is an apology necessarily needed. However, an apology can help defuse the situation and assist the individual to address the emotion, as well as the root cause of the feelings. There are some general steps that can be taken to validate another person's feelings, though every situation is different:

- Identify and acknowledge the emotion: This can be difficult if the person does not openly communicate their emotions. As a result, it may



require that you infer what they are feeling from their behavior. Check with them to make sure that your understanding is correct. Broad assumptions about what is wrong might make the problem even worse.

- Identify the source of the emotion: Ask the person what is causing this response? It might be that they are unable to identify the cause themselves. It is still important to acknowledge that the emotion is occurring and that you want to understand.
- Validate the emotion: Accept what they are feeling, even if you don't agree. Keep in mind that an apology isn't required if you don't believe it is warranted. Simply informing them that you accept their feelings can have a strong effect, as well as empower them to address the emotion themselves.



Your body language often conveys more than your words. Assume an open, friendly position as you talk with the other person. Empathy can be good way to put yourself in their shoes, even if you haven't necessarily experienced the same emotion. Asking questions can help clarify what the other person means and shows that they have your attention and are listening to them. Assigning blame is not necessary nor is it helpful.

Different Perspectives

To address these issues on a deeper level, try to understand the situation from the other person's perspective. Ask each party involved what happened and they will each provide a different perspective about the level of communication occurring within a given situation. Dad might think that coffee on Sunday morning is enough to talk about what is going on and make a plan for the week. His son, however, may be tired of hearing Dad tell him what to do all the time and that he never seems to listen to any of his ideas. While neither party is wrong, they obviously have different perspectives and emotions. How can they come together to build a better understanding of where each is coming from? The Ag Legacy newsletter entitled *Difficult Conversations* discusses these different perspectives and how to share them in a way that is non-confrontational. Helping each party better understand the three stories. Find it at AgLegacy.org under Newsletters.



Moving Forward

Forgiveness might be required when one person is hurt by another. Forgiveness is the conscious and deliberate decision to release resentment or anger. Forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean reconciliation. The person who forgives is not required to return to the same pattern of relationship or to accept the same harmful behaviors. In addition, forgiveness is critically important for the mental health of anyone who has been harmed or victimized. It allows people to move forward, rather than holding them back to reexperience past injustice or injury. More on forgiveness and the role it can play in an Ag Legacy can be found in the Ag Legacy newsletter titled "Should Forgiveness Have a Place in Your Ag Legacy?" See it at AgLegacy.org, under Newsletters.

Moving forward through forgiveness might be the next step if other family members are reluctant to acknowledge and validate the emotions expressed. This can also empower an individual to act for themselves. Asking questions can help identify the cause of the emotions and what can be done about it. A person may ask themselves:

- Why do you feel left out?
- What happened or what has changed?
- What can you do about it?

Relying on others to validate your feelings may leave you wanting at times. No one can force another person to acknowledge their own or someone else's emotions. Be willing to address the concerns internally and move forward.

Other Resources and References

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