Families for a Sustainable Future

People • Communities • Environment • Future Generations
Sustainability is the Most Important Challenge – and Opportunity – for Business Today

We are living in pivotal times.

Never before in human history has it been clearer that the world in which we live cannot indefinitely sustain the way in which we live.

But never before in human history has it also been clearer that there is a viable solution – a way to consciously alter the business of our lives to permanently improve the fabric of our lives.

Some call it Responsible Capitalism. For others, it’s Inclusive Business. Still others think of it as Conscious Capitalism. However you choose to regard it, the fact remains that businesses today stand on the cusp of a tremendous opportunity to truly make a difference for the longer term.

Today, we are increasingly able to quantify the intangible benefits of a sustainable business strategy. Today, we are moving beyond mere cost efficiencies. Today, sustainability isn’t just good for business – it is good business.

Whether a business is looking to mitigate risk in the short term or innovate for the long term, sustainability can be a distinct differentiator in a competitive marketplace. More and more, employees are saying, I don’t want to work for a company that doesn’t have a clearly stated vision around this. It matters to them. And increasingly, it matters to the market.
There is no business like Family Business. With values that transcend generations, family businesses have the potential to truly change the world.

Family businesses have a vested interest in the future that gives them a longer-term perspective than companies ruled by short-term results. What makes them so distinctive is their intergenerational nature. In many ways their family is their greatest source of competitive advantage. But they need a little help.

For 25 years, Family Business Network International (FBN) has dedicated itself to helping family businesses grow and prosper through the exchange of best practices, new ideas, and peer-to-peer learning that is most potent and powerful within the sanctity of a secure network.

Over the next 25 years, we believe we have a unique opportunity – and responsibility – to help our member families (both current and future) to do well by doing good, and to realize our collective hope for a sustainable future.
INTRODUCING POLARIS™

Just as the north star Polaris has been used for thousands of years as a beacon and reference point for astronomers and navigators to find their way, the FBN initiative by the same name seeks to inspire member families on their journeys of personal reflection to discover their True North—a clarity of purpose, an internal compass that can guide their every decision.

With FBN, family businesses can journey together, through shared learning and the positive impacts we make within our organisations, our surrounding communities, the environment at large, and the legacy we leave to future generations.
A Shared Purpose

But Polaris is more than just a journey of discovery. It is a comprehensive framework and guide for every family business as they journey on the pathway to sustainability. It starts with a shared vision and a commitment to work out the details: Where do we start? How fast can we go? But before we delve into the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of Polaris, let’s start with the rallying cry – the Collective Why:

Sustainability should headline the agenda for every family business today. Not just because we have reached the tipping point – where pursuing a sustainability strategy is good for business – but because no other organizational entity is chartered to address the future with as long a timeframe, as intrinsic a focus, as holistic an approach.

Sustainability represents the convergence of values that family businesses bring, and the value that they create for the future. Simply put, it’s the right thing to do.

Front-runners for Sustainability

To create momentum around building a sustainable future, we need a few flagbearers. Thankfully, they can be found. Forward-thinking businesses have seized the opportunity to engage with empowered customers and suppliers to be global citizens, and to do the right thing.

These businesses have become companies that care about people and the planet. They’ve embraced the Triple Bottom Line: a business model that measures corporate performance against not just economic but also social and ecological yardsticks. They’ve taken time out to weigh the importance of the sustainability conversation, and they’ve taken a stand. These organizations have strategically remodeled themselves, and they’ve taken pains to translate and communicate that position both internally and externally.
For family businesses, the notion of sustainability can encompass actions that don’t stop at business performance, but also extend to such areas as education, philanthropy, investments and lifestyle. Shaped by its own culture and values, a family can, for instance, make community service de rigueur for the next generation, or embrace socially responsible investing. Decisions taken here by the family can complement business sustainability initiatives.

While the business implements initiatives connected to its people, the environment and the community, the family is best positioned to bring the final dimension of the Pledge to life—the role of future generations.
Every cause needs a champion. Sustainability is no different. For many family businesses, a champion from within the family or business who embraces the ‘triple bottom line’ often provides the spark that ignites the family’s sustainability journey.

However, in order for sustainability to be embedded within the DNA of the business, this champion must quickly move the mindset from “I (the champion) to “We” (the business) by rallying key stakeholders from within the family, business and owner subsystems. Achieve this, and sustainability will enjoy forward velocity.

Simon Torres, President of the Board
Grupo Contempo, Colombia

My Spark: My sister was the initial spark who set our family business on this path; but when she joined Colombia’s Ministry of the Environment, I took over the charge to champion sustainability within our company.

My Why: We have an incredible opportunity to do something valuable in life through the way we do business. As a family business, we actually borrow from our children. We have received something; and as responsible citizens we want to give something back. It’s our turn; and it’s now. Because sustainability is not just about the environment, but about our role in our community and in society. It’s our family commitment.

My Goal: My ambition is to transform buildings in Colombia. My father founded a traditional construction company – now we are transforming the company into one that designs, builds and operates sustainable buildings, both in the environmental and social sense.

Lina Wang, General Manager
Singlee Lighting, China

My Spark: My father was the spark who set us on our course. We witnessed our beautiful hometown of Fujian being slowly but surely destroyed by pollution caused by the production of incandescent lighting, and determined to do something about it. In 2008 he founded Singlee Lighting which manufactures only LED lights. Now the responsibility to carry on that good work is shouldered by me.

My Why: I truly treasure and am thankful for what my father is passing down to me – I want life to be about more than just the number of terms in our bank account. I have chosen to invest my life’s work in something that has great market potential but also very positive environmental impact. LED lighting offers energy savings, contains no mercury, and creates virtually no pollution during production, use and disposal.

My Goal: Singlee Lighting was founded to help address China’s energy crisis. Our company is committed to working with like-minded partners to produce only the highest quality LED lighting for its economic and positive environmental impacts. We are determined to foster a more sustainable future for the people of China and the rest of the world.
Nobody’s saying it’s easy to be a sustainable business. That said, it is becoming easier. Increasingly, there are incentives and tools to help us all create, capture and deliver value in a way that is sustainable for our people, our purpose, and this place we call home.

At FRN, we believe that sustainability is a journey and not a destination. We are developing tools and case studies to help family businesses make tangible progress through shared learning and the measurement of positive impacts in the lives of their people, their communities, the environment, and the legacy they leave to future generations. With increasing engagement and practice, family businesses move through progressive stages on the pathway, become game-changers, and redefine business for the 21st century.

Setting the Stage

Holding the mirror

Connecting the dots

Innovating for the future

Redefining Business

Innovating for the Future

The real benefits arise for your family business when sustainability moves beyond operational issues and becomes a genuine driver for innovation. It will reshape the way your family business thinks, makes and delivers products and services. It will create new meaning for your people and customers, and change the external perception of your brand and business. It will drive competitive advantage and, ultimately, redefine your business.

Connecting the dots

Once family ownership and business leadership are aligned and a draft plan for moving ahead has been established, key stakeholders including suppliers must be engaged to ensure the broader visibility of the plan. Employees are empowered, capacities developed, and progress against goals will need to be measured and tracked.

Holding the Mirror

Once the ‘why’ stage, the business must take the time to analyze where it currently is and then decide what actions will be needed to get you to your destination. Big business decisions need to be taken, and it is critical that everyone is clear on the opportunities, challenges and risks that lie ahead. It is also important to establish a governance structure at an early stage, so all the key stakeholders are clear on who is accountable for what, and how information will be shared going forward.

Setting the Stage

Signing the FRN Pledge is a great first step in your family business’ sustainability journey, as it establishes a shared understanding between the family and business on how you value people, communities, the environment and future generations. The Pledge serves as a launchpad as you strive to define the ‘why’ of your family business. This ‘why’ will often be deeply rooted in the family’s values and contain a strong viewpoint on the legacy to be shared with the next generation. It goes beyond what your business does, and makes clear what you stand for. It defines your purpose and clarifies your destination.

The Pathway to Sustainability

Setting

INCREASINGLY ENGAGED

HOLDING THE MIRROR

CONNECTING THE DOTS

INNOVATING FOR THE FUTURE

REDEFINING BUSINESS

INCREASING IMPACT

INCREASINGLY EMBEDDED
The Polaris Initiative by FBN invites family businesses to discover their True North—a clarity of purpose that guides their every decision—and journey together to create an environment where hearts and minds are fully engaged, and where great aspirations are powered by the desires of people to do something purposeful and worthwhile. To build a better tomorrow. To be part of something larger than themselves.

But it begins with us. When we increase our individual and collective ability to recognize and respond to new, more sustainable ways to doing business, when we make the shift in our minds that we have embraced in our hearts, we’ll open the door to shaping a sustainable business strategy, and realize the hope we can have through families for a sustainable future.
Family Business Network International (FBN) is a global network run by family businesses, for family businesses, with the aim of strengthening success for family enterprises across generations. Founded in 1989, it brings together more than 2,850 families and 8,300 individual members – including 2,800 Next Generation members – across 60 countries worldwide. FBN is a not-for-profit organization, offering unique value and insights to family business members. It helps family businesses grow, succeed and prosper through the exchange of best practices and new ideas. Being by families, for families, FBN creates a unique environment in which family business learn from each other and share the passion they have for their family and their enterprises, and how to reconcile these two passions. For more information, contact polaris@fbn-i.org or visit www.fbn-i.org