Chapter 3
Entry into the Business

Time spent at the family business as a child, or summer jobs as a teenager, can give the successor valuable work experience and insight into its culture and people. But when he or she reaches the age when permanent job decisions are made, new rules come into play.

**Make Me an Offer.** A potential successor should enter the family business in response to a specific, formal offer to fill a job that is needed. Pay and performance standards should be clear. This sets the stage for a businesslike, mutually respectful relationship between the successor and others in the business. It also means other employees who may doubt the successor’s qualifications are less likely to feel resentful.

Many families shape successors’ expectations by setting policies early for family participation in the business and enforcing them fairly. The policy may define when and how family members become eligible for employment and, in some cases, what level of commitment they must make. The rules should be communicated clearly. They act as an agreement between parents and their offspring.
Once a job offer has been made, the decision to enter the business should be regarded as an important personal choice for the successor. He or she should not feel pressured or compelled. No decision should be taken as irrevocable. And the successor should be able to weigh the offer independent of any family coercion. Without freedom to choose, the potential successor is less likely to make a strong commitment to the family business.

The decision to commit to the family firm marks a turning point for the successor. At first glance, a job in the family business may seem like an easy route. In the long run, it probably will be harder than taking a job elsewhere. Family businesses can be difficult to run, according to noted organizational psychologist Harry Levinson, particularly if family feelings or traditions interfere with management. To succeed, the successor not only will have to emerge from the family's shadow and earn the respect of others involved with the business, but also acquire important business and leadership skills. If the successor fails to make a contribution, he or she may be strongly resented by others in the business. And if relationships among family members are strained, entering the business can add new stress.

From the business owner's perspective, a successor may need time and space to decide whether to join the company. Though incumbent leaders may be anxious themselves about the successor's decision, it is imperative to remember that the choice can be an agonizing, soul-searching one for a young successor. Many factors must be considered, including some that have nothing to do with the family or the parent-child relationship. The wisest and most compassionate thing the business owner can do, once