**Passing On The Reins/Reign**

In my travels over the past 18 months, I have met with loggers in 30 states to hear and listen to their issues, opinions, and challenges.  For the most part, the challenges are all common, regardless of the region – profitability, workforce, and markets.  But recently, I was approached by some younger loggers that expressed a concern that the American Loggers Council was not hearing the “next generation.”

These guys aren’t looking at the exit but are prepared to invest in the future of the American logging industry.  So, we held an impromptu side meeting with about twelve loggers to get their insights and opinions.  Aside from the universally common issues, I was surprised by one new concern that was shared amongst nearly all of them – frustration with the unwillingness of their family business to “Pass on the Reins.”

It is critical that multi-generational companies continue to be passed on from one generation to the next.  After all, this has been the most successful succession plan for maintaining the logging infrastructure.  At the Associated California Loggers conference, one presenter asked the group how many are second, third, fourth, and fifth-generation companies.  Many hands were raised, including a fifth-generation family logging business.

Unfortunately, due to the many challenges within the logging industry, it cannot be assumed that the next generation will continue the family business.  In fact, I have heard many across the country state that they do not want their children to enter the business.  So, those family businesses in which the next generation is willing to commit to the long hours, difficult environment, challenging markets, and uncertainty, are fortunate that they have the opportunity to hand over the reins and ensure that their lifetime of investment and sacrifice will be a living legacy carried on by the next generation.

However, the risk in not recognizing the readiness of younger loggers is that they will become frustrated and discontent and either take the next step on their own or leave the timber industry.  In this case, the succession of a company will be too often occurring, selling off the equipment and “retiring.”  Because of this, it is important for the senior member of the family to be willing to take the lead and start the conversation. Acknowledge that your son/daughter is just like you: raised in the business, proud of what they have learned, and eager to follow in their father’s and

grandfather’s footsteps.  Don’t wait until you are sure they are ready. None of us are ever as ready as we would like, but we have the foundation of experience, as well as the skills and ability to handle the uncertain challenges that are inherent in the logging industry.  Besides, you’ll be there to fall back on for advice if necessary.

There are two types of rein/reign.  One refers to reins that guide and direct.  After you have successfully navigated the route, steered your logging business on its successful course, and brought it to the point it is, the time will come to hand over the reins for someone else to continue the journey.  Reins can also stop forward progress if the trip is over or the direction is unknown.

The other reign refers to exercising authority in the manner of a monarch (i.e., as a king) over a period.  The reign of a good leader is vital to governance and order.  However, the reigning period is fixed and will always require the coronation of a new leader to continue the orderly progress of the endeavor, your logging business.

So, as your reign ends, be willing and prepared to pass on the reins to the next leader of your company.  You’ve prepared them well to continue what you have built.  Allow them to build upon that foundation.

This concept applies to the American Loggers Council and state associations as well.  When these young loggers approached me about not hearing their voices, I confessed that they are right because my input comes primarily from the Board of Directors.  Men with considerable experience and knowledge who have built the American Loggers Council into the leading timber industry association in the country.  The same can be said for the leadership of the state associations.

Likewise, we need to begin developing the next generation of association leaders to ensure the ongoing growth and success of the associations.  That is why the American Loggers Council will establish the Next Generation Logging Leadership program for tomorrow’s leaders in the timber industry.

**“We must ensure that the young trees have what they need to grow.”**