



FAMILY TUG-OF-WAR

Why it's so important for families to work together as a team

By Roy Williams, President, The Williams Group

When I think of a team – any team – I think of the goal, setting discipline, hard work, coordination for action, all part of team building. Sharing common values and deep, authentic trust are also part of becoming a successful team.

Many years ago, I watched a football coach put a large Houser rope in the middle of a football field, then asked the offensive team to gather on one side, the defensive team to gather on the other. He asked both groups to pick up the rope and begin a tug-of-war, to see who would win or lose. The struggle lasted less than a minute or two, when the coach stopped the process. The coach then moved all the defensive players over to the same side as the offensive players, and had them pick up the rope together, leaving the other end lying loose on the ground. He told the team to pull. His teaching moment was they were now acting together as a team, with a common mission of pulling the rope up the field. It was easy! There was no defensive team or offensive team; they were one team, and they would win or lose *together*.

The coach then brought on to the field the equipment managers, medical team, other coaches, and everyone integral in any way, because they too were part of the team.

Many of the players had not understood these participants were vital to the team and were needed to keep the team on the field and functioning to their full capacity. You may be asking, why am I sharing this with you?

We often find families who are required to take on specific roles, to accomplish the long-term mission or purpose of the family wealth. For families to take on any role, and do so effectively, coordinating the actions required, they will need to work together as a team.

Unfortunately, we find many, many times, families are divided – much like the offensive and defensive team members – and the tug-of-war goes on. It could be about money, things, power, control, the lack of communication, or different perceptions and trust issues, of course.



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Rarely has any family that we have met articulated the values they hold together, the purpose of their wealth, or even the definition of what wealth is, or who is considered family. The list seems to be endless.

Often, the tug-of-war rope can have players no one really knows, and the family is unaware they are the key players. Others, such as trustees, both corporate and individual, advisors, executors, charities, beneficiaries all form part of the team.

In our illustration, we tie one end of the rope to a post or rock. We use the post or rock as a symbol of the trust. The entire family can pull and pull and never move the post or rock, leaving the entire family in a mood of resentment and frustration. Some family members will hire legal teams to cut the rope next to the post or rock, and that impact within the families can be dreadful.

A family trust is usually part of the legal strategy and a useful structure. It is one of many control tools to reduce the problems of preservation and governance or tax planning. We work with a family to develop common agreed-upon values, a common

agreed-upon mission, and a team working together based upon authentic trust.

The purpose of the tug-of-war example is to exemplify the breakdown of many teams of families, and businesses, and almost any entity that works together to accomplish a common goal. The breakdowns can be between generations, different family groups, spouses of family members, and many others. These breakdowns can occur due to perception, differentiation, lack of commonly understood communication skills, or many other reasons – even the inability or understanding to the five responses to a request.

Remember, moods are always an assessment of the future and these assessments are what most of us use to make decisions or take action. Every team in every sport celebrates the journey, scoring together or lifting each other through adversity. What do you do with your team, your family?

Let's focus on team building.

If you would like to know more about becoming a trusting family, visit: www.thewilliamsgroup.org.