

Hostile Takeover: How to (And Not To) Transition to the Next Generation

Sam W. McQuade

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Family business transitions can be notoriously thorny, mostly because interpersonal dynamics, different management styles, and relationship challenges all play a role in a company's shift from one generation to the next. In *Hostile Takeover*, Sam W. McQuade provides a valuable, in-the-trenches view of the issue, detailing how he came to be involved in his family's business and the ensuing havoc and rewards it created for him, both personally and professionally.

McQuade's father started a beer distributorship in North Dakota in the late 1940s and continued to build the company into a successful enterprise over the next three decades. The business was supposed to be passed on to Sam's younger brother, Gerard, but his death in a car accident changed the plan and pushed McQuade on a path he never thought he would be taking.

Written in a largely chronological form, *Hostile Takeover: How to (And Not To) Transition to the Next Generation* begins with the distributorship's humble beginnings and then shifts to McQuade's early career. The detailed exploration of his college experience and subsequent job interviews takes away from the book's main theme, particularly since McQuade is attempting to provide a useful guide to family business transitions.

In particular, descriptions of colorful company employees slow the pace of the book and don't tie in to any larger lessons about business. Similarly, he later delves into beer history, and wanders into topics like funniest beer commercials and memorable moments from an Anheuser-Busch convention. Since the book is fairly short, detours like these can make the material seem unfocused, as if McQuade is simply jotting down a collection of random thoughts.

McQuade's description of family tension and his reluctance to go into the business provides a refreshing level of honesty. He is drawn to the opportunity to be his own boss, but he also expresses doubt that his father will "give up" the business that he worked so tirelessly to build. As it turns out, his concerns are well-founded. McQuade works hard to establish himself as a leader in the business but faces much opposition, not only from his father but also from the longtime employees who see him as "the kid." Intergenerational friction creates a power struggle that lasts until his father's death in 1992.

McQuade's experiences with the transition are artfully described. Anyone who was raised in a family business is likely to recognize the frustration, anxiety, and defeat that can be coupled with a sense of accomplishment and perseverance. The author navigates this minefield with humor, grace, and a healthy amount of humility.

But McQuade does not just speak as a member of the next generation. He also details how he took on the process of handing the business over to his daughter, seeking to prevent her from facing the roadblocks that caused him so much grief. For anyone who wants an honest, sometimes humorous, and often insightful look at family business, *Hostile Takeover: How to (And Not To) Transition to the Next Generation* is a compelling choice.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (November 9, 2012)

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