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# Your Bottom Line

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## Your best natural resource

It's difficult to find, train, and keep good employees. However, in your search for the ideal worker, you may be overlooking one of your best sources of long-term, quality help—your own family, including your children. The benefits of bringing your family into your operation can be phenomenal in many different ways.

It was once expected that children would become involved in the family business. Today, that tradition has become less prevalent. It seems children neither know nor care what their parents do at work. This is, in part, because they cannot be involved in their parents' jobs.

When I was teaching at the university level, there was little I could do with my children in terms of my job, except to bring them to an occasional family affair, such as a barbecue. Since I taught psychology, every semester I would take my children into class to be tested by my graduate students. The children loved it, but it was a very meager part of my work world. Most modern work environments have no room for employees' children. And, with the child labor laws in place to protect our children, they cannot easily find a job until they are at least 16.

We are extremely fortunate as independent photographers to be able to get our children involved in the business, often at a very early age. And, as far as I am concerned, the earlier the better. Children may complain at first about having to work while their friends are playing or watching television, but the benefits they can gain are far beyond anything that can be measured in terms of dollars. And, in their own way, they can contribute to the general operation of the business. While initially it may seem to be more trouble than it's worth involving your children in your business, it's the long-term goals that must be considered.

As a society, we're experiencing a very difficult period. While strict child labor laws certainly have their purpose, there are some drawbacks. Many children have nothing to do once they leave the classroom. In some cases, this idleness contributes to many of society's problems: drug abuse, gangs, and youth violence. The list contin-

ues to grow. Children need to feel useful. Working in a family business is a good, safe way to accomplish that. Plus, it fulfills the need for quality time between parents and their offspring.

We raised three children in and around our business. From the earliest possible moment they were intimately involved in many different ways. Generally, children have a natural desire to want to participate in activities with their parents and, indeed, they can get a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from performing even the simplest tasks. While they may complain about having to work, they are often bragging to their friends about what they do in "the real world."

Our children were always part of our business. They learned responsibility and about the rewards that come from hard work. They also learned what it means to share in the rewards. When they were very young, they came to the studio after school and had daily assignments, including general cleaning, and sorting negatives. We did our own color processing with one-shot chemistry and the children fought over who was going to run the equipment and dump in the chemistry.

They also were permitted to visit with other businesses on the block. My son was paid 10 cents a day at age 6 to sweep hair at the nearby barber shop. It was a high point of his day. That job was even more important than working at the studio because he was working for someone beyond the family circle. One of our employees encouraged him to demand a raise to a quarter. He made his demand, and was promptly fired. It was a lesson he never forgot.

It wasn't all work. First, we put in a TV/playroom for the kids at the back of the studio. Later, when we began working into the wee hours of the morning, we purchased a camper where they played, studied, and slept until mom and dad could go home, which was often as late as 2 or 3 AM.

When he was only 10, my son ran our word processor, entering names and addresses, and sending letters to thousands of customers. He was paid by the letter. Today, he is completing a degree

in computer science and runs Pixel Magic, our electronic imaging division. Our two daughters were also involved in the business from the very beginning. One daughter has gone on to earn an MBA. She is now chief financial officer for Pixel Magic and also assists at EPS. Our other daughter continues to work in the studio and for EPS, although she has now moved into a full-time teaching position at a local elementary school.

It is critical that your children are paid for their performance. With child labor laws being as complex as they are, it's important that you talk with your accountant or tax advisor as to the best way to handle their pay. In addition, you'll want to set up a savings plan for your children so they don't automatically spend everything they earn. Our children were able to pay for many of their expenses from their earnings, including cars and gas.

Naturally, our children complained a bit about having to work. That's to be expected. But, they also felt very valuable in their ability to make a contribution to their family, and they enjoyed making real money. While their friends often had nothing—other than television—to occupy their time, our children worked and still had plenty of time for play. The situation could not have been better.

Initially, children in a working environment require a great deal of supervision and assistance—making them less productive in terms of cost benefits. But, how do you measure all the other things a family gains from the experience? There are many intangible benefits that are extremely important.

Very few people today have the opportunity to get their children directly involved in their working world. If you are fortunate enough to be an independent professional photographer, you owe it to yourself and your family to get your children intimately involved with every possible aspect of your business venture. The benefits to your bottom line will be clear. But even more important are the benefits to your children's bottom lines—their preparation for living in our complex world. ■