

## BUSINESS

### BALANCING ACT



CANDACE WEST/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**MORE HOURS:** Bruno Silva, right, runs Chima, a Brazilian steakhouse chain, with his brother, Lucas, and mother, Marisa. Their old informal gatherings have become weekly formal strategy meetings to keep the business running efficiently.

## FAMILY FORCE

WHILE TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES BRING EXTRA PRESSURES AND RISKS FOR FAMILY BUSINESSES, THEY ALSO PROVIDE AN GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO PULL TOGETHER



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I've always had a fascination with family businesses, eager to watch how much responsibility Donald Trump shares with his daughter and saddened when the second generation at Luria's couldn't keep the chain afloat.

Mixing business with family can be tricky, even risky. During a recession,

I figured, it must be downright scary. Imagine the pressure of losing the company your father built, or telling a cousin you need to lay him off.

I decided to delve behind the scenes in a variety of industries to find out how families were faring in business and life in this difficult economy.

Of the nation's seven million businesses of fewer than 100 workers, about 20 percent are owned and operated by more than one family member, according to Cox Family Enterprise Center at Kennesaw University. In South Florida, that figure is even

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# Family businesses dealing with special pressures

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higher: More than 70 percent of our private ventures are considered family businesses, according to Martin Luytjes, who teaches a family business class at Florida International University.

One of those family businesses is Chima, a Brazilian steakhouse with restaurants in four states and a corporate office in Fort Lauderdale. Bruno Silva runs the chain with his brother and mother. It's been an eventful six months for the Silva family.

As pressure on profit intensified, Silva realized he needed to switch from conversations on the fly with mom and bro to formal strategy meetings at least once a week. With every expenditure in question, the meetings get heated on occasion.

"There are more arguments, more giving of opinions but at the end we are family and we have the same objective — to succeed and improve our business," Silva says.

In tough times, family businesses can pull together in ways that other companies may not do as easily. Silva says at Chima, all family members are putting in more hours, traveling to each restaurant and forgoing trips to their native Brazil. This is particularly hard on mom, Marisa Bruno, whose husband lives and runs commercial ventures there.

We've all heard the stories of rivalries, power struggles and disputes that spark family conflict and estrangement even in good economic times. Neil Goodman, founder and CEO of Aventura Worldwide Transportation Services — a limousine rental company that he operates with his wife, son and daughter-in-law — says he is working harder to make sure arguments don't get personal.

**DISAGREEMENTS**

Goodman, the self-proclaimed grandfather of the South Florida transportation business, says he and his stepson, Scott, have had to make some tough calls in recent months. The battered tourism market had the two disagreeing about whether some hotel accounts should be dropped.

"Our relationship definitely took a dip because the economy took a hit," he says. Yet, Goodman says, in some ways it's easier to have family work alongside him. They know exactly why he might need to work late, require everyone to rein in spending or possibly even take pay cuts. Because they understand, he says, they forgive: "At the end of the day, we're still close. On Sunday nights, we have a big Italian dinner. The kids come over, we drink beers and reflect on the coming week."



CHARLES TRANGE JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**MAKING TOUGH CALLS:** Neil Goodman, seated, runs Aventura Worldwide Transportation Services, a limousine rental company, with his wife, Toni, second from left, stepson Scott Tinkler and Scott's wife, Kristina.

FIU's Luytjes says these companies go into survival mode more easily. "They can trim staff and get family to come in and help."

On the flip side, Luytjes says, the stresses of business are more likely to come into the household, especially if a family member needs to be laid off to keep the business afloat. "When times are tough, it's a little harder to leave work at work."

Eric Schigel from Opustone Granite & Marble in Miami and Jacksonville has found that to be true. Lately, he and his dad, co-owners, talk about work much more outside of the office. "A year ago we didn't have to make as many strategic decisions as we do now," Schigel says. He says this all-consuming lifestyle has advantages: "If one of us makes the wrong



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decision, we can figure out the solution together." Of course, steering a multigenerational family business through a free-fall economy has its own set of challenges. At the El Dorado Furniture chain headquartered in Miami Gardens, 20 members of the Capó family and 700 employees rely on the company for their paycheck.

**PRESSURE**

That creates lots of pressure for seven Capó brothers who make up the executive board of the company founded by their father. Clearly, they don't want to be known as the generation

that failed. "My dad told us the company is on loan to us to give to the next generation," says Jesus Capó, chief information officer.

For that reason, the brothers started cutting costs a year ago, and stuck with their plan to open an 11th store in South Florida during a recession that hit the housing market hard. "We had to agree not to blame the economy, that our destiny was in our hands."

So far, the Capós haven't had to lay off workers or cut pay. Of course, family members would be the last to go. But all employees have received some straight talk: "We tell everyone we will not accept mediocre work, even from family."

Send your comments and ideas to Cindy Krischer Goodman at cgoodman@miamiherald.com.

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