



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Leading the Family Business in Transition

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Joseph Z. Lewis is the director of sales for Orbital Engineering Inc., a company founded by his father, Bob, in 1969.

He earned a degree in film and television from the former College of Santa Fe, now Santa Fe University of Art and Design. He worked in television for 10 years, followed by a career in the hospitality industry, before returning to his hometown of Pittsburgh.

After a stint working in the media department for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Lewis entered the sales department of Orbital Engineering.

My father, Bob Lewis, created Orbital Engineering Incorporated in 1969. At that time, Orbital was nothing more than a single room with a draft table and a salesman in a three-piece suede suit. Today, Orbital is a thriving national engineering firm, employing more than 250 people, with offices in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, Chicago and Houston. Orbital helps support its heavy industrial and manufacturing business partners with two affiliate companies: Orbital Technical Solutions Inc., which provides drone services, data analytics and software development, and Jobtec Inc., which provides staffing and recruiting services.

It's no secret that continuing a successful family business into the next generation is not an easy task. From the Harvard Business Review to Forbes, articles and studies from business academics have repeatedly warned of next generational failures. A 2014 Alternative Board study found that 56 percent of family business owners are either unhappy with their succession plan or don't have one at all, and 62 percent of owners believe it's unlikely their business will



remain family-owned by the next generation.

Leadership in any business has its challenges, but the transitioning family business has a unique set of challenges that we are facing head-on. First, we believe it is important to identify what characteristics of the business have made it successful and how those can be easily replicated and applied by employees, regardless of turnover. Second, it is imperative to identify important client relationships and understand



