

## Have clear pact for succession

### IN BOX

By KAREN E. KLEIN  
Special to The Times

**Dear Karen:** What is your recommendation for a father who is about to leave his company to his two sons, both of whom worked equally hard over the years to grow the business?

**Answer:** If both your sons want to continue in the business, you could structure a succession plan that makes them equal partners. Talk to a certified financial planner about how best to do that, legally and financially.

But start by having an honest conversation about what they want and don't assume that they will continue in their current roles after you are no longer involved in daily operations. Aim for an agreement on how their roles will change after you retire.

Evaluate what they are doing now and what their strengths and weaknesses are professionally, said Constance Dierickx, a business psychologist at consulting firm RHR International. "Their roles don't have to be unequal but they can't be the same," she said. "One son could have an outwardly facing role like CEO, and the other an inwardly fac-

ing role like COO."

Don't put one son in a visible leadership role and the other in a staff position, unless that's what they want, Dierickx said. "Make formal agreements about ownership and about what will happen when your sons are at loggerheads."

## Find right sites for social networking

**Dear Karen:** Every week I hear about a new social-networking site that can create a buzz about my business. How do I know which to join?

**Answer:** Social media tools can provide highly efficient and cost-effective ways for entrepreneurs to share ideas and resources with large numbers of their peers. Robert Jenson, chief executive of Las Vegas realty firm Jenson Group, has leveraged social networking using a corporate — rather than a personal — approach.

"Start with sites catering specifically to a given industry for a highly qualified audience and the most pointed discussion. Beyond that, it's best to stick with the well-funded, highly trafficked sites such as the B2B network LinkedIn.com," Jenson said. "The smaller outlets may not fare well over the long term, which can put all of the Web content you've published at risk of disappearing."

Jenson recommended that time-challenged entrepreneurs join just one or two social-networking venues and make the content they contribute robust

and informative.

"Perhaps choose one industry-specific site and one more general like MySpace.com, rather than having many venues on which the content and discourse is sparse, underwhelming and ultimately an exercise in futility," he said.

## Rely on designers to help site shine

**Dear Karen:** I have a brand new start-up and am working with very limited funds. Should I create my own logo and website design?

**Answer:** Not unless you're a graphic designer. Your time is better spent elsewhere, and an unprofessional look will hurt your efforts, said Terri Stone, editor in chief of CreativePro.com and InDesign Magazine.

She recommended that you look for student designers who would work for free or at low wages to gain some examples for their portfolios. "Even more established designers may do the work pro bono if they believe in your company, or if you can work out a mutually beneficial trade," Stone said. To find veteran designers, search online using terms such as "graphic design" and the name of your city or your area code.

*Got a question about running or starting a small enterprise? E-mail it to ke.klein@latimes.com or mail it to In Box, Los Angeles Times, 202 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.*

