

*MARK CASELLA*

LIVING  
A LEGACY  
THAT  
LASTS



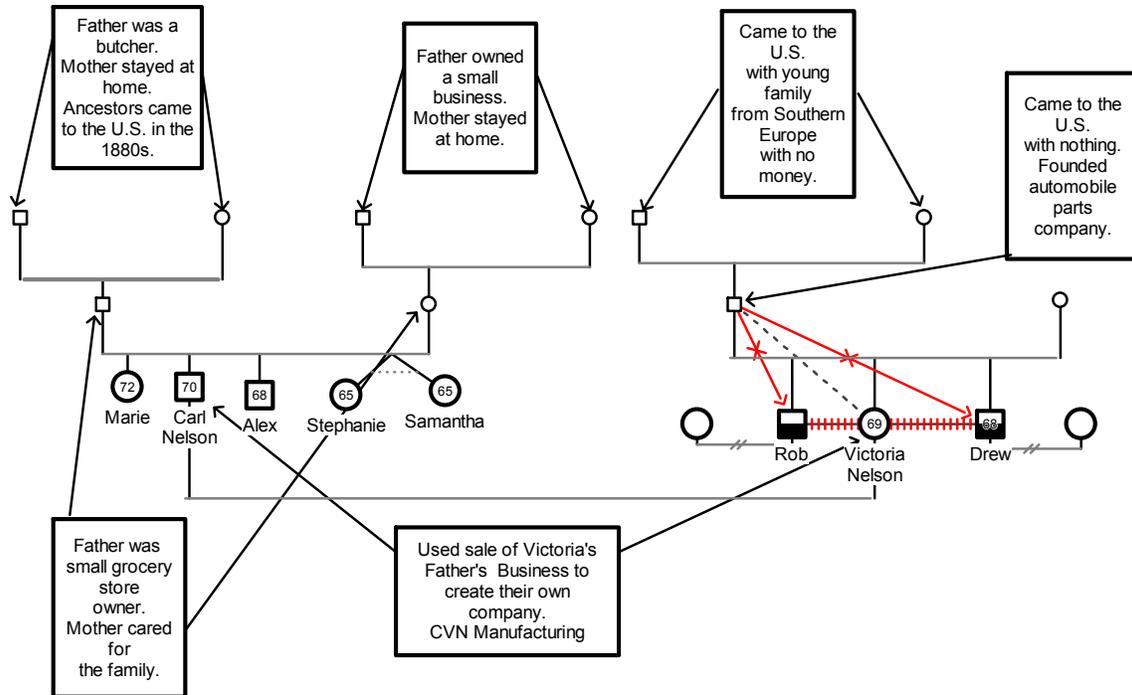
**Using the Success Mapping Process to Pursue  
What Matters Most to You and Your Family**

A genogram (Figure 2.1) gives us the ability to organize large amounts of information about a family, helping us see patterns of activity, behavior, and attitudes that are transmitted across generations. It's a combination of genealogical information, such as births, deaths, marriages, and separations, and a timeline of important life events. We're looking for clues to the values, beliefs, and behaviors that have formed this family.

Once completed, the genogram is a powerful depiction of a family's life story. We have witnessed many a-ha moments as family members study the genogram and begin to realize which events and patterns have shaped their own lives.

Figure 2.1

### Carl and Victoria Nelson Ancestral Genogram



#### Jenny's View: What the Genogram Reveals

The family into which we are born is known as our family of origin. That environment becomes our frame of reference for all that we know, at least until we are physically equipped to move into the outside world.

We are who we are because of those who have come before us. We didn't acquire our behaviors, habits, temperaments, and genetic tendencies in a vacuum. We are a product of the past and present generations of our family.

When we use the genogram, we're looking at the family as an interlocking system where each generation, household, or individual has an effect on the others, especially in times of change, stress, or conflict. Looking at all the components of that system provides a broader context of what is influencing the family than just looking at one person or one issue.

More than a detailed version of a family tree, a genogram is a tool that is widely used by medical practitioners and family therapists to organize a person's family history. In our practice, this family diagram is a rich source of information for us and our clients.

A genogram allows us to identify life events that can cause stress or anxiety in a family. It can also identify relationship patterns that have been in play for generations and are working their way through the family. It illustrates the power of the family dynamic to shape the family. For families who own businesses, this dynamic may affect their enterprise as well.

What at first seems a confusing jumble of circles, squares, and squiggly lines tells the story of the family's journey. This may include the tale of the immigrant journey from overseas and how the family established itself once here. The genogram may also uncover relationships that may have been strained or broken as well as those that were strong and sustaining.

When family members start talking about the stories behind each of the circles (women) and squares (men), they begin to open up about the true fabric of the family. We frequently hear phrases like "I never realized what effect my aunt and uncle's divorce had on my cousins" or "I'm not really sure why we don't talk to Aunt Nancy's kids. I think she and Mom had a big fight, but I miss them."

This can open their minds to the idea that they may be repeating or avoiding patterns in their family system but, more important, by looking at their family in this way they have an opportunity to choose what they want their relationship lines to look like.

Family systems theory, pioneered by psychologist Murray Bowen in the 1960s, underlines the importance of understanding how each of us is a part of something bigger than ourselves. It can also give us insight into how we relate to others outside our immediate family.

### **The Family Story = The Family Values**

When we begin the genogram process, participating family members usually approach it as a basic accounting of relatives they knew personally. They're also recalling stories about how family members reared their children and reacted to adversity. Many families have supported their children through college because education is something they value. Many families overcame obstacles as they were establishing their business through hard work and perseverance, also values the family embraced.

In recognizing the values that come through in their story, family members can begin to determine which values are truly important to them and how they wish to live them. What does prioritizing education look like? What does having family support as a value look like in real life? These are the questions families begin to address as they discover and articulate their values.

## **Celebrating Family Traditions**

The genogram process helps individuals memorialize their family story for their children and generations to come. Through the process, we uncover traditions that may have not been articulated as such, but have become an important thread in the fabric of the family.

The process helps them understand and appreciate how their history has formed them into who they are today. As we go through this exercise with a family, they may be describing the traditions of a beloved aunt's holiday parties or Sunday visits to their grandfather's house and suddenly realize the impact that person has had on them and/or the family.

As family traditions are passed on from one generation to the next, so too are the values embodied in them. Carrying on these traditions can deepen relationships and promote emotional closeness within the family. As the family grows, honoring and celebrating the family's traditions become ever more important in keeping the family together.

For families who collectively own and benefit from a family business, the genogram process can help strengthen relationships within the family through their increased awareness of how the enterprise touched their lives and helped shape the family over time. If the family can maintain a connection to their purpose as defined by their values and traditions, they are more likely to continue to benefit from their enterprise through the third, fourth, and in some cases the fifth generation.

### **The Timeline: External Influences**

While family members are recounting the lives of those who have come before them, we're also paying attention to what was going on in the world at various points in the family's history. For example, World War II was a big influence in many of our clients' lives. Women went to work and/or became widows while men went off to war. Many veterans came home after the war to start their families and businesses, giving us the Baby Boom and decades of economic prosperity throughout the nation.

The cultural effect of the outside world can be a significant influence, as families adjust their lives to meet different challenges such as war, recession, or even Prohibition. We have seen these various types of societal events turn out to be major factors in shaping our clients' lives. Taking into consideration the impact of external factors on a family's journey allows the family to understand why things may or may not have happened the way they did.

Carl and Victoria learned much more from their family stories as we walked them through the genogram process. The experiences and relationships they shared with us were key to understanding what was and is important to their family.

The next step in this process was to go through a similar exercise with each of their children and spouses by household. Our objective throughout was to

identify the values and beliefs that would define what mattered most to the Nelson family.