

ECH0tape's Sister Act

What happens when you take an already intense, complicated and close relationship then add business into the mix? Cherie and Risa Edelstein talk about getting on in life and in business.

How did you get started in the family business?

CHERIE: I often worked for my parents during summer holidays and winter breaks – filing, stuffing envelopes, standard office work. I could work a few hours between classes, make a few dollars, and spend it on the weekend just as fast. But it also gave me an opportunity to see what office work was like, and in hindsight, it showed me a lot of how businesses are run from all angles. After living in New York for a few years, I came back to ECH0tape full time in 1991, and started as an Accounts Payable clerk. I continued in that role for a while, until we needed to hire additional people to help, giving me my first taste of management. Over time, I got more involved in other areas of the company, like Customer Service and Distribution, and eventually Production in 2001. I continued in Management and Operations with Purchasing, Logistics and Inventory in 2011, as well as Vendor Relations. I have been very fortunate to learn the business from all the different areas.

RISA: For years, I wanted nothing to do with the family

business. I was proud of what my parents had accomplished, and could see the impact that my sister was having, but I was stubborn and wanted to stake my own claim in the tech world. That was fun for a while, but the lure of family got stronger and stronger, so I started working part time in 2011. It began with some marketing projects, like the company website, but then got involved with more projects and finally ended up working full time in 2013.

What is the upside of working with your sister?

CHERIE: The best thing about working with Risa is that she gets it. She understands my goals at a different level and she's as invested in the company as I am. I also get an amazing opportunity to see her strengths up close, see her grow, and use her as a sounding board. And even though the road is sometimes bumpy, I know that I can trust her implicitly.

RISA: We've actually gotten to know each other much better. Plus, she has a better work/life balance and I have learned to be more balanced as a result.

What's the biggest challenge you've had working with your sister?

RISA: It is sometimes hard to separate business and personal issues. Things can quickly get tense; but we've learned to move on more quickly than when I first started.

CHERIE: Sometimes we're too close to situations and we lose perspective. Sometimes we take things really personally and forget that we are wearing two hats – a business one and a family one. It can be difficult to separate them at times and respect each other's boundaries. Plus, she can talk business at all hours of the day or night whereas my mind needs a break sometimes!

What has surprised you the most about working with your sister?

RISA: How well she handles a crisis. I am not great at handling emergencies, so it is comforting to know that the company has someone at the helm can effectively take care of emergencies when they come up – and they come up often.

CHERIE: I think I have been most surprised at how focused she can get on something and her process of seeing it through. Her creative process is very different from mine, yet our goals and values are very much in sync.

What advice would you give to someone working with their sibling?

RISA: Think twice. It really stretches your emotional capacity and forces you to put your feelings aside and do what is best for the business.

CHERIE: Set boundaries that you are comfortable with and make sure you discuss them together. Family always has to come

first and the business should not infringe on that relationship. Separating the two can be difficult so it's important to establish the rules, respect each other, and try to work in different areas so you can both contribute equally in your own way.

Because you work together, what have you learned about yourself, or your sister, that you did not already know?

CHERIE: We both have our strengths and they are at times very different. When we let each other explore those strengths, our ability to work together on so many levels expands greatly and a greater confidence grows between us.

RISA: I do not have a sense of humor, but I guess I knew that. I am always very serious and sometimes my sister has to put it in perspective for me by saying: "We are selling tape, not saving lives!" Although I have been known to argue with that!

What can you say about your family, its culture and traditions that affect your working relationship with your sister?

CHERIE: My parents instilled a very strong ethic and value system in us. They worked hard every day, ran their business and their daily life with honesty and integrity, and were very generous and humble. I think my sister and I are both blessed to have inherited that from them, and it affects and propels



our daily life at home and at work.