

PRESS RELEASE

Family ties

Family-owned businesses can be as unique and idiosyncratic as the families that own and control them. But it has been proven time and again that their ownership structure imparts a long-term orientation that provides them with the edge over many public companies. We speak to Jurie Hanekom about this – he is the Chairman of leading windows and doors manufacturer, Swartland, a company that has been run by the Hanekom family for over 65 years.

25 October 2016, Johannesburg: If you've ever admired the beauty of finely crafted timber or aluminium windows and doors, then you probably know about Swartland, the South African-grown company that pioneered manufacturing gorgeous timber and aluminium windows and doors and supplying them to the South African market and abroad. The growth of the 65-year-old family business is legend within the built environment. How did it get there?

The Swartland story began in 1951 with Oupa Hanekom, in the small town of Moorreesburg, a few wheat fields north of Cape Town. He started supplying the local community with hardware and electrical goods, but Oupa's ambitions lay far beyond the boundaries of Moorreesburg, and it wasn't long before joinery became a speciality of his. When his son, Jurgens, took over the reins, he brought new ideas to the business and made a definite move into the manufacturing and distributing windows and doors from its impressive Atlantis factory. The company grew from strength to strength as customers responded in droves to the company's range of timber windows and doors. The 1980s saw further growth into both local and export markets, as it emerged as a top class producer of Pine and hardwood windows, doors and other products.

Today, under the leadership of the third generation of Hanekoms – namely Jurie, James and Hans – Swartland's remains in the top of its class. Its product line still offers beautifully crafted Pine and hardwood timber windows and doors at every price point, but it also offers a wide range of other products, including the increasingly popular KENZO range of aluminium windows and doors, and the Col Timbers range of mouldings.

Of course, these are all interesting aspects of the Swartland history, but speak to current Swartland Chairman, Jurie Hanekom, and he'll tell you that one of the main underlying reasons for the company's continued success – family: "Most consumers still attach some kind of mysticism to family-owned businesses based on the perception that they are friendlier, better employers and more caring, and therefore must produce a better end product. However, it really is more than just mysticism or perception – it is a reality based on the fact that a family business has access to unique ingredients that can provide a lasting competitive advantage."

Hanekom offers an overview on some of the main benefits of running a family business:

- 1.) **Agility:** In a family business, we can think of something in the morning, begin working on it in the afternoon, and make it a reality within a few days. It is this speed and agility that allows us to roll with the punches so to speak, and ensure that we are consistently able to set the industry benchmark, remain relevant and stay ahead of the pack.
- 2.) **Solidarity:** Harsh office politics, caused by competing agendas, can often get in the way of doing business efficiently. Although families also compete, when the goal is to help the family business win, turf battles tend to diminish. We tend to be much more efficient compared to other companies that have to go through a more politicised process of getting things done.
- 3.) **Nature versus nurture:** Some of us are just born to entrepreneurial risk-taking – so it's likely that our kids are too. When kids grow up in the business, they absorb the skills it takes to succeed. I began working in the family business as a boy, and I can tell you, as the son of the owner, you get to know and understand the company in a very intimate way – it is in your blood and part of who you are. You also get to see how it affects the lives of your parents – you understand the trials and tribulations, and what it takes to make it a success.
- 4.) **Authenticity:** Family is the place where you feel comfortable enough to be who you are, and not pretend to be who people expect you to be. At Swartland, we laugh a lot more and we fight a lot more at work. Although family members tend to be a little more emotional than non-family members, it is this ability to be fearless and emotionally honest that can really help a family business thrive.
- 5.) **Trust:** This is an imperative component of any business, and who can you trust more than your own family? What is particularly special about Swartland is that many of our employees have been with the company for so long, that they have become part of the family. It is these working relationships that have been built on trust that are an important sustainable competitive advantage because today, trust is such valuable and rare commodity.
- 6.) **Control:** There is something really special about the feeling that you are steering the same ship your father, and your grandfather steered before you, and one that will be steered by future generations of Hanekoms after you. This feeling of custodianship is a powerful and stoic feeling that empowers you to do your very best that you can do, which is always a benefit for the business. Because the business means something to you, you are willing to go that extra mile every time... and it is the ability to control this destiny that is prized amongst all else. It is a unique perspective, because unlike listed companies that are most often first about profitability, a family business means so much more – it is about history and it is about heritage.
- 7.) **Next generation ingenuity:** Companies can often lose their competitive edge when leaders lose touch with what's new. A smart family business maintains its edge naturally, when it brings in the next generation, who often see things with fresh new eyes that are on pulse with what is new and trending.

There is no doubt that working with family can be challenging, but it can also be really rewarding, says Hanekom. He offers his top three golden tips for business owners thinking of bringing their family into their business close: “First and foremost, expect your family to work twice as hard compared to other employees in order to earn their respect. Secondly, remember that you shouldn’t bring personal family issues to work with you, and that you must never fight in front of the staff. And thirdly, the head of the company has to exert authority over all employees, and all employees have to respect this authority, whether they are family or not.”

He concludes: “Consumers are growing tired of massive corporate conglomerates and cheap and nasty products. They are increasingly looking for smaller businesses with principles and who offer better quality products. They are even willing to pay extra for this. As such, family values are taking centre stage in today’s economy. If you are able to recognise that value, and work together with your family for the common good, then there is no doubt that your family could be your biggest competitive edge.”

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Released on behalf of Swartland ([www.swartland .co.za](http://www.swartland.co.za)) by The Line (www.theline.co.za).