

ROBERT PASIN: RETHINKING RADIO FLYER'S LITTLE RED WAGON WITHOUT REINVENTING THE WHEEL

Soon after joining his multi-generational family owned business, Robert Pasin learned the company was in trouble. Though the company hadn't changed, consumer preferences had. How could they gain a competitive advantage without losing everything that made Radio Flyer an iconic part of Americans' childhood memories?

Robert Pasin:

I always felt like the company was this permanent fixture in our lives. But when I started working in the company full-time in 1992 when I was 23 years old, my very first day on the job my dad, who was the CEO at the time, grabbed me and said, "Hey Robert, come here. There's somebody here from the bank. He's here to help us. His name is Jerry."

And what I didn't know then was that Jerry was a bank appointed consultant. So, Jerry brought me into a conference room and sat me down and he was this big guy and he was very red-faced and he just started yelling at me saying, "You have no cash. Do you understand you guys have no cash?" He just kept saying it over and over to me and he was staring into my eyes. And I was sitting there and just after a minute I said, "Well, how much cash are you supposed to have?"

Esther Choy:

Imagine something that has always felt like a permanent fixture to you, like a national monument or an oak tree, something you grew up with, something that means a great deal to you. Then one day, a stranger told you with absolute certainty that this permanent fixture is about to disappear. How would you feel? What would you do?

In this episode, we are going to hear a story about a third generation CEO, how he fought to preserve a hundred-year-old family enterprise that not only means the world to him, but to many American as well.

Radio Flyer is an American toy company best known for their iconic little red wagon. In 2017 Radio Flyer celebrated its 100th year anniversary. But there was a time when the company looked like it might no longer be a permanent fixture in Robert Pasin's life.

And who's Robert?

Robert Pasin:

My name is Robert Pasin, and I'm the Chief Wagon Officer at Radio Flyer

Esther Choy:

Uh... Chief Wagon what? Where did that come from?

Robert Pasin:

Yeah, well, many years ago, when I would tell people that I was the CEO of Radio Flyer, a lot of people would respond saying, "Oh, my gosh, that job is so much fun. Do you get to test the wagons? What does that job mean?" And as I got reactions from people, I thought, "Well, that title sounds too serious for what our brand means, and for how much Radio Flyer represents fun." So that's when I came up with Chief Wagon Officer. Really, my goal was to make people smile when I said the title, and have it really capture what Radio Flyer's all about.

Esther Choy:

Making people smile, that sounds good! So, what is Radio Flyer all about? We'll find out soon. But before Robert got to the fun part, how did he react to people like red faced Jerry yelling at him about having no cash? And how did he work within and lead his family enterprise to transform it from this struggling entity, to one that thrives by standing at the forefront of their customers' needs?

Hi! I am Esther Choy, the executive producer and your host of Kellogg's Center for Family Enterprises' own podcast series: Family IN Business. A podcast that features stories of leaders, their families, and the family enterprises they transformed.

Let's hear a bit of context. What is Robert Pasin's relationship with Radio Flyer?

Robert Pasin:

I was born into the family that started Radio Flyer. That's what gave me the opportunity. And at a very young age, I fell in love with Radio Flyer, and what it means to people. One of my first memories of being aware of that was when I was five years old, and my dad brought me to work with him. We walked around the factory, and I saw the shiny red wagons on the conveyor line, and heard the sound of the punch presses, and smelled the paint. It just all seemed like some sort of magical Rube Goldberg machine, all these wagons moving around, and they were all going out into the world to bring joy to families. I just thought it was so cool, and I fell in love with it. Growing up, I worked in the business in the warehouse, and then after graduating from college and doing a year of volunteer work teaching in Chicago, I joined the sales team. I've been with the company ever since.

Esther Choy:

Over the decades, Radio Flyer has received many letters along with pictures from their customers sharing stories about what the little red wagon has meant to them. For example, this letter came from Chris W, Carpentersville IL. He had this to say.

"If Norman Rockwell had designed a wagon, I don't think he could have done better than the Radio Flyer. It is Americana on four wheels. Our wagon did services for kids, and survived everything we could dream of throwing at her. She carried everything from Barbies to bricks. She was a go-kart and a grocery cart. A spaceship and a magic carpet."

Now, if your family owns a company that produces products that are a long-standing part of so many American's childhood memories, maybe you can assume that the company will be around forever?

Well, not really.

Robert Pasin:

When I came into the business 25 plus years ago, the company was really at a crossroads. The company had been doing well for 70 years, but pretty much the company had not changed. We were a steel stamper. We manufactured wagons out of steel, and we were very good at that. But consumer preferences had changed, and steel wagons were on the decline, and plastic wagons came out from our competitors. We didn't know how to make plastic wagons.

We really got kicked in the gut when competitors came out with two new plastic wagons. And as soon as we saw these plastic wagons we knew we were in trouble because the plastic wagons...you could do things with that material that you couldn't with the traditional steel and wood wagons. You could mold in seats for the kids, you could mold in cup holders. And at the time, half of our sales were the Town & Country Wagon, which is this red wooden wagon that is very iconic and many, many people grew up with it. In fact, it was our best seller for 30 years and it was our cash cow. It was half of our sales.

And the problem was that those plastic wagons started taking away sales from the Town & Country and it was as if fuel had been poured on the fire that was burning on our sinking ship. I mean, we were really in complete crisis.

Esther Choy:

Can't they just pivot and make their products in plastic? Well, it's not that simple.

Jennifer Pendergast:

Any business having made that pivot would have a business challenge. But similar to other family businesses, there's often a family challenge layered on top of a business challenge, which is that all of these people that were good at the things that we did before, maybe people that the family loves and is loath to let go.

Esther Choy:

This is Jennifer Pendergast, Kellogg Center for Family Enterprises' Executive Director.

Jennifer Pendergast:

So, what do we do with the family orientation towards trying to support and care for their employees, as if they're part of a family? If we have to, we change our employee base to address challenges. Families' businesses are often more insular. They don't tend to bring in a lot of talent from the outside. So then that raises the question of, where is this marketing branding talent going to come from? Families are often very wedded to their history.

And families are frugal. And so a lot of time a pivot costs money before you make money. And then families are also, by the way, risk averse. So pivoting doesn't come with a guarantee that the new strategy is going to be successful. So the combination of additional investment and additional risks can be something that's very hard for families to get their arms around as well.

Esther Choy:

So, what did Robert and his family end up doing? Did they pivot? If so, how?

Before we get into it, we'd like to thank Robert Pasin, Chief Wagon Officer at Radio Flyer and Kellogg, class of 1997, for joining us for our inaugural podcast series Family IN Business. Robert is one of thousands of family leaders who have shared their stories and wisdom with the Center for Family Enterprises over the decades through its speaker series, MBA elective courses, and executive education programs.

So, don't forget to check out familyenterprises.net.

That's familyenterprises.net to see how you can take advantage of these eye-opening professional development opportunities set in intimate and private environments.

Now, let's get back to Robert's story.

Robert Pasin:

And we had to figure out what we were going to do because the game had totally changed and we had completely missed it. But we had a lot of questions that we were asking ourselves like how are we going to make a plastic wagon when no one in the company knew anything about plastic? How are we going to design a plastic wagon? Because we didn't have a product development team. We had two engineers who were great guys and knew everything there was to know about steel, but they didn't know how to make anything out of plastic. And if we didn't know how to make plastic in our own factory where would we make it? We had never outsourced a product. We'd never made a product outside of our own walls.

It was kind of an existentialist threat to our company, and we had to ask a lot of questions, like "What is Radio Flyer? Are we a manufacturer, or are we a product-development company, or are we a brand? And what can we be the best in the world at?"

Esther Choy:

What can we be best in the world at?

This is indeed an existential question, one that requires years if not decades to figure out. But Radio Flyer, when Robert first joined as a fulltime employee, didn't have the luxury of time. Because there are also people sent by the bank, like red-face Jerry, yelling at you while delivering bad news at your doorsteps.

Robert Pasin:

In 1992 when I was 23 years old. My very first day on the job I joined the sales department at the time. And at the end of the day, my dad who was the CEO at the time grabbed me and said, "Hey Robert, come here. There's somebody here from the bank. He's here to help us. His name is Jerry."

And what I didn't know then was that Jerry was a bank appointed consultant. I didn't even know what that meant at the time. And I later learned you don't want one of those because it means you're in trouble. And Jerry brought me into a conference room and sat me down and he was this big guy and he was very red-faced and he just started yelling at me saying, "you have no cash. Do you understand you guys have no cash." And he just kept saying it over and over to me and he was staring into my eyes. And I was sitting there and just after a minute I said, "Well, how much cash are you supposed to have?" And he started laughing because he realized wow, this kid is totally clueless. He's just starting out here.

But what Jerry later went on to tell me was that we had a lot of debt and we weren't making any money and the company wasn't growing. And so we were in this weakened financial condition because for many years we had been making a product line of wheelbarrows that were perfect for manufacturing in our factory but we didn't have any intellectual property on the products. And we started losing out to competition. And ultimately, we exited that line of products. But it left the company in this weakened financial condition that I walked into. And at the time the offices were dingy, everyone had been there for a really long time. I think we maybe had one computer in the office. I mean, so it wasn't a vibrant, progressive, creative type of company at that time.

We really had the mentality of a manufacturer, in the sense that we thought about, "Well, what can we make in our factory? And then, can we sell it?" Versus, "What do consumers want and expect from Radio Flyer, from our brand?" And when we shifted that, it did unlock a lot of potential.

Esther Choy:

This shift in the types of questions Radio Flyer was asking is very significant. Research shows that family owned businesses tend NOT to be entrepreneurial and innovative. But. There are notable exceptions.

What does it require of the leaders for these exceptions to happen? Let's hear from Jennifer again.

Jennifer Pendergast:

If a family aspires to be around for generations, then the CEO, in that scenario needs to be thinking forward about what could put us out of business, and how do we make sure that we can still be here? But I still think it takes an unusual person. And I think in Robert, it shows visions, strategic mindset, courage, and also some humility I think, to be able to say, "I'm willing to leave behind what we've done before and figure out..." It takes a learning mindset, because he also had to learn how to do something new. He didn't know how to lead a company like that. So, he put himself at risk as well. And that took, I think, both courage and a learner profile from the leader standpoint as well.

Robert Pasin:

We ultimately decided that the most valuable thing we have is the brand, the Radio Flyer brand, and consumer's relationships with the brand, and what it means to them, and the fact that it means adventure and imagination. People would tell us these wonderful stories about being a kid and being pulled by someone they loved to somewhere that was fun, and imagery like, "the sun was in my face, and I could smell the green grass." And so we said, "well, those are the emotional elements of our brand. And how do we then tap into those to create other awesome products that people will really love?" And so we really focused less on being a manufacturer, and more on being a product-design company that could make those products, that could deliver those kinds of experiences that people really, really love.

Esther Choy:

If you build it, they'll come. Right? No, not necessarily. In fact, the odds stack up quite against them. Because first of all, what are they going to do with all the assets that they've built up for 70 years that solidified their number one position in a market that was fast disappearing?

Robert Pasin:

Radio Flyer's transformation was a long road of struggles involving closing a factory, laying off employees and failing product development many, many times.

Those are some of the toughest decisions, but there was also a huge, very steep learning curve. We didn't have a product development team at the company. We had people who knew how to make stuff out of steel, and they were really good at it. And they were great people, but we needed to find designers and engineers who could make products out of plastic, and who could make different products that we had never made before, like tricycles, and scooters, and other things that kids could ride on. Once we made the decision, it was very clear, but then we had to do a huge amount of work building up the team with the skills and talents that we needed for growth.

Esther Choy:

Was everybody behind such a difficult decision?

Robert Pasin:

Well, no. People were not behind the decision, really. It wasn't just one day, where we said, "Okay, this is it. We're not going to be a manufacturer anymore." It happened over time. But I think, through a process of communicating really clearly to people, and the fact that everybody in the company I had known since I was a kid, growing up in the factory, and working there and everything, so there was a huge degree of trust. And my dad had always led the company with a tremendous amount of integrity and authenticity. So there was a huge reservoir of trust. And as we made these changes, we did it as gently as we could, and as gradually as we could, so that we did things like offer early retirement and severance packages to people, as we really started to change out the team and hire people with different talents.

Esther Choy:

Now, closing of a manufacturer, especially one that is attached to a very iconic American brand. Did that attract any media attention?

Robert Pasin:

I mean, we were hoping that it wouldn't but it did. And when we announced it ... Since we're not a public company we didn't have to communicate it, but news got out and there was an article in the Chicago Tribune announcing it. And the day that article ran...this was in 2004. News crews came to our parking lot to interview people when they were leaving work. And these were people who we had recently communicated were losing their jobs and we were shutting it down.

And one of the amazing things I think that happened on that day was that nobody said anything negative about the company or about our family. And I think it's because we handled ... We had built up a huge reservoir of trust with the people who'd worked in the company. We were very open and transparent with them about why we were doing this. And we treated people with a lot of respect. And we were generous in the way that we parted with the people through severance and outplacement and things like that. So again, it was definitely the worst day of my career having to communicate that. But I think ultimately while people were really sad, they knew we needed to do it to survive.

Esther Choy:

Robert, his family and his team survived that day, the worst day of his career. But that day wasn't the end. It was just the beginning. The beginning of a long road of challenges to transform his family enterprise. For example, Radio Flyer, plastic wagon. Can that really work? For Radio Flyer?

Robert Pasin:

We didn't even know if the consumer would accept a plastic wagon from Radio Flyer, this traditional classic brand. And we didn't know if our retail customers would buy it either. So we had all these questions. But I knew that if we were going to succeed, we had to go where the consumer was and we had to deliver what the consumer wanted. We started to just figure it out. And it was a super steep learning curve. We had to find a design firm that could design a plastic wagon. We had to find a manufacturer that could make the plastic wagons for us. And we made a ton of mistakes. I mean, the first one that we came out with was the Push Pull wagon; it was too small and it didn't sell.

And then the second one we came out with was green because one of our competitor's plastic wagons was green. And we were trying to imitate the competition. That didn't work. And the third time we did a plastic version of that Town & Country Wagon that everyone knew. And then sales started to increase and we started to learn. And finally, we came out with our big winner, the Pathfinder, that featured these patented flip-up seats that would create two wagons in one. And that's when we really regained our number one position in wagons. But it took several

years of learning and trying and coming out with those plastic wagons until we really figured it out.

Esther Choy:

This whole process, this long road took... can you guess how long? Have a number in your mind and let's ask Robert how many years, really, was "several years"?

Robert Pasin:

Well, at least ... I would say 10 years, from when we decided that that's what we needed to do, to get to a place to have a critical mass of a team that could really start generating a lot of new products. One of our bestsellers for 30 years, the Town and Country Wagon, was our cash cow, but it was on the decline. We really hadn't come out with a big new item since then. Well, now we're developing 20 to 30 new products every year, to fuel our growth. So it's a huge change for us.

Esther Choy:

One of the best ways to prepare for and deal with big changes is to surround yourself with your peers, people who understand your situations, your challenges and your dilemma. That's why each year, hundreds of family enterprises leaders gather at our global campuses to learn from one another. For example, Chris Herschend is one of our long-time friends and supporters for the Center for Family Enterprises.

Chris Herschend:

So, I'm Chris Herschend. I'm a chairman at my family's business. We call it Herschend Enterprises. We got to come to Governing Family Enterprises several years ago. I learned a lot from John, and maybe more importantly, all the other people in that program and that I've met through the center since then. That's probably been the richest component for us, is all the peer families we've bumped into.

When you get family leaders in a room with other family leaders and the focus is not what I'd call an internal, but an external focus where you're looking around and saying, well, how do you handle this? And, you deal with this too; it is magic and it just repeats consistently.

Esther Choy:

And the magic that Chris talks about takes place at one of our executive education programs called, Governing the Family Enterprise. It convenes twice a year in Evanston IL, at our main campus.

When you're accepted in the program, you will be joined by peers from leading family-run organizations around the world and you'll learn how family governance can help sustain business continuity, family unity and commitment.

Getting through this huge change has paid off. Starting from its founding year in 1917, Radio Flyer has more than 100 award-winning products available in over 25 countries. It has also won

the best workplace numerous times by a wide variety of media outlets such as *Fortune* and *Crane's Chicago Business*.

And in 2017, it even won a Daytime Emmy Award with an animated short film that Robert was the executive producer of. The film is called *Taking Flight*. It's really good. You should check it out.

Although now the company is at a good place, two types of threats are lurking, not in the background, but in the close horizon. The first one is the ever changing landscape of the retail space. And the second...do kids even play outside these days like their parents and grandparents used to? Can you peel them away from their digital devices?

Robert Pasin:

Yeah, it's an issue we talk about a lot. How do we bridge the digital to the physical? And the screens are very, very compelling. I have four kids too, and I've seen the same thing. I think one of the ways that we want to try to stay relevant through that medium is through story-telling, and bringing the Radio Flyer brand to life in different ways. A couple of years ago, to celebrate our 100th anniversary, we created an animated short film called "*Taking Flight*." And it's this really heart-warming story about a kid who's getting dropped off at his grandpa's house, and he figures he's going to have this boring day, and they discover the wagon, and have all these adventures. And it won an Emmy.

It was very exciting. We were viewing that as an experiment of how we get into entertainment and storytelling, so that we can be presenting Radio Flyer through those ways? Through either a TV show, or a movie, or even games that could be on a screen, but then could translate from digital to physical. We haven't quite figured all that out yet, but it's something we're talking about a lot and working on.

Esther Choy:

What can we expect from Radio Flyer in the future, of any entertainment piece, anything that we could possibly enjoy?

Robert Pasin:

Not really, not yet. It's top-secret right now, sorry.

Esther Choy:

One last thing about the future changing landscape in the space, and that is the changing retail, or traditional retail space. How does that impact your business, and how are you adapting to it?

Robert Pasin:

One of the many changes that's a constant is that the retail landscape has changed through the years. Sears was a huge retailer. That was our biggest customer. And then it was Kmart, and then it was Toys-R-Us, and Walmart, and Amazon. So those changes have always happened, and we've always just had the point of view that we are going to have our products where people

want to go and buy them. So, it's our job to figure out how to change. One of the things about not being a huge company that's really great is that we're very nimble. I remember going to Amazon when they were one building in Seattle, 20 years ago, and first starting to sell them. We're just always looking for emerging retailers, and we just make sure that we're serving them, and we're going to have our products where people want to buy them.

Esther Choy:

How do you prepare for the future in ways that are embracing that risk-taking that your grandfather really lived by, but still being the third-generation steward of the business that he created?

Robert Pasin:

Well, I think being a privately held family business is a huge advantage in terms of preparing for the future. There's actually a great *Harvard Business Review* article called "Why the 21st Century Will Belong to Family Businesses." In the article, they talk about the fact that family businesses can be more agile. They can make decisions faster, maybe, than the large public company, because the stakeholders are usually in the business, running the business. And I think that's something that we're very decisive about. We move fast on things when we make decisions, and we're very in touch with our customers and what's going on, and we're listening to them constantly, and we're always monitoring for the small changes, so that we can make those adjustments and changes. So that we're changing at least at the same pace as the external environment. And that's, I think, just how we need to do it.

Esther Choy:

Whether it's founding a business with family, or inheriting a business from family, the word family, in the phrase family business, isn't only serving as an adjective, like thriving business or declining business.

The word family... in family business... should really be a noun in and of itself, as in family IN business. Because the family in the business IS its own entity but it just happened to have been entwined with the business they are in together.

Here are two ways that Robert Pasin and his family manifest the concept of Family IN Business during those years in transformation at Radio Flyer.

One, what happened when he and his father disagreed fundamentally about how to turn the business around? And two, how did he deliver the sad news of closing the factory not just to the workers, but, to the widow who's married to the founder of Radio Flyer, Robert's own grandmother.

Robert Pasin:

I remember specifically as we were preparing to communicate that and we tried to handle it as best we could, and communicated early, and did outplacement for people. But as we were getting ready to announce it, I called my grandma who was the wife of my grandpa, the founder

of the company, to let her know that we had decided to do this and why. She was an Italian immigrant. Her whole life was being part of the business and being married to the founder of the business. But she said, "It's very sad but I understand if you're doing it, it must be the right thing." I think there was definitely some sadness around making that change, but I think everyone understood that if we didn't do it, it wasn't going to stay a business. And it certainly wasn't going to stay a family business because we would've either gone out of business or had to sell the company.

Esther Choy:

I'm reminded of what John Nelson, CEO of SEED Beauty, said in an interview with us in 2019.

John Nelson:

A family in business means that we're making a conscious decision to come together. And the business that we're in today is very likely not necessarily going to be the same business in the future, and certainly, not going to be the same business for the next generation, if we even get to that point, if they want to join that business.

Esther Choy:

Robert and his family, they were making a conscious decision to lead a family IN business.

Are there any examples where the way that you see things or how you would run things are very different from how your dad would approach things?

Robert Pasin:

Yeah. I mean, the biggest fight that my dad and I ever got in was during those first few years when it was really tumultuous and we were in crisis. And I was running around at times like a chicken with my head cut off trying to do anything I could to help the business and to learn. We were approaching our 80th anniversary in 1997, and I saw it as this amazing opportunity to have a PR campaign and tell my grandpa's story about being this immigrant success story coming to this country and creating this product. But we did not do any PR. In fact, my dad had told me that if there are ever any PR inquiries just say no and hang up the phone because he liked his privacy and that's how he had led the company. And he didn't want the family name associated with the company name.

I remember when I walked into my dad's office the day that I was going to pitch him on the idea of doing this PR campaign. I pretty much knew what he was going to say because I've heard a lot of it before. But I started by saying, "Hey dad, I know you don't like PR and you like your privacy." And I remember he leaned back in his chair and he lit a cigar and I said, "Dad, there's no smoking in the office anymore." And he's like, "No, what are you talking about? Nobody told me about this." But my dad's a very mild-mannered guy so he continued to smoke the cigar while I pitched him the idea.

And I said, "The company's struggling. This would be a big shot in the arm for the brand. I want to tell the story of the founding of the company and I think we should build the world's largest

wagon to get attention." And my dad's like, "are you crazy? What do you want all this publicity for? You're going to have reporters here. They're going to be asking you questions that you don't want to answer about our sales and things like that." And so we got pretty heated and fired up.

But then I just kept at him. It was pretty relentless. And that's one of the good things about being in a family business. A lot of times you can maybe push those things farther than you would and not lose your job if you're a member of the family. So ultimately my dad just said, "okay, fine. You can do it but just leave me out of it. I don't want my story as part of this PR campaign." And we did it. We built the world's largest wagon. We told my grandpa's story for the first time and we got incredible coverage. We were on CNN, we were on the Today Show, and it really revitalized the brand. And when it was all said and done my dad said, "that was a really good thing for the brand even though it made me feel uncomfortable from a privacy point of view. That was a good thing." It was good in the end but it was a little messy getting there.

Esther Choy:

So, you wore him out.

Robert Pasin:

Just like kids will do. Kids will wear out their parents.

Esther Choy:

Yes. No matter what age you are, you always get the license to wear your parents out.

Robert Pasin:

Yes, exactly. It's a strategy.

Esther Choy:

Every leader, every family has different ways of dealing with its crisis. But often it's the day to day leadership that prepares the leader and the enterprise for these challenges. So, how does Robert lead on a day to day basis? Well, he has three things going for him.

Number one.

Robert Pasin:

Well, my mom, as far back as I can remember, always told me that I was born with a smile on my face. We can debate the facts on that exactly. But she always told me from a very young age, I was always a very happy kid. I've always loved to make people laugh. Humor is a huge part of my personality, and it's become a huge part of how I lead the company.

I feel like humor is just such an important part of life. The person I am at work is the same as the person I am at home. And the way I try to bring humor to work is I just am myself. But some of the ways I do that is, we have a big Halloween party every year at the company, and I always try to dress up in a costume that either pokes fun at myself, or celebrates something about Radio

Flyer. I laugh a lot with the team. I think it's really important, because I think being at the head of the company, and being the third generation at the company, it can be a little intimidating to people, and so I think it's important just to kind of disarm them, and be more accessible through humor.

Esther Choy:

Ok, humor is helpful. Laughing is actually really good for our health. And being able to laugh at ourselves with our team can... inoculate us from one of the most common and persistent challenges in product development: failures. Good old-fashioned failures.

And here's the second way Robert leads on a day to day basis.

Robert Pasin:

We have spent a huge amount of money and time and effort on products that failed. And I used to beat myself up about it. "Why didn't I see that coming? It seems so clear in hindsight that that was a bad product idea." But I've just come to learn that there's really no way around it, because even though I've been doing this for almost 30 years, I still don't know which products are going to be successful and which ones aren't. I don't think anybody really does, in the world of coming out with new products.

So, we just try to mine those failures for as much learning as possible, so that each time we get a little bit better at coming out with new products.

Esther Choy:

Embracing failures while not being too hard on yourself is also important, along with incorporating humor are two of three ways Robert leads.

Now, the third way that he leads on a day to day basis is... a little surprising.

Robert Pasin:

I've always loved that saying, follow your passion. And I'm very passionate about what I do. But as I've gotten older, I kind of feel like there's a little bit of a spin on that. I think it's probably more important to follow your purpose, and it can take a while to figure out what your purpose is. But I feel like if you do follow your purpose, which to me is how an individual can uniquely, positively impact the world, that you're going to be passionate about that. Because if it is a deep purpose like that, the passion will just be there. Early in the business, when the business was really struggling and I was there, very early on, I discovered my purpose, which was to lead a transformation of the company from a company that was really on the decline to a company that was thriving, and that could do all kinds of amazing things that would live out the potential of the Radio Flyer brand and what it means to people.

Esther Choy:

Finding your purpose can take a long time. But when you're with your peers, people who know and understand your struggles, relate to your values and priorities, and have stories to share, you're all that much more likely to find that purpose. And in turn that purpose will fuel your passion.

Tune in for our next episode where we're going to hear from three different family members and how they made the difficult decision to close a legacy business altogether in order to stay ahead of their fast changing and fiercely competitive industry.

John Nelson:

Look, we're either going to run some of these experiments without betting the whole company on our own and try to disrupt ourselves from the inside-out as opposed to waiting for one of our customers, quite frankly, to disrupt us from the outside-in.

Esther Choy:

That's John Nelson again, CEO and co-founder of SEED Beauty. What happened to those experiments? And why did they have to close the legacy business? And what did it take to close it in order to give birth to something new?

Thank you for tuning into Family IN Business, a podcast sponsored by the Kellogg Center for Family Enterprises. Thank you again, Robert Pasin, Chief Wagon Officer of Radio Flyer. Our show is supported and advised by Dr. Jennifer Pendergast, Kane Power is our audio engineer. And I'm Esther Choy, the executive producer, your host, and author of the book *Let the Story Do the Work*.

Thank you for listening, and let's meet again at the next episode of Family IN Business.

Esther Choy is the President and Chief Story Facilitator at Leadership Story Lab, where she teaches storytelling to institutional and individual clients who are searching for more meaningful ways to connect with their audiences. Leaders, in turn, use their stories to communicate authentically, inspire others and create lasting impact that they previously considered out of reach. Since 2010, Esther has combined the science of persuasion and the art of storytelling to help her clients gain a competitive edge.

Since launching Leadership Story Lab, Esther and her team have served clients such as Allstate, BP, Eli Lilly, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Group, Roosevelt University, Brookfield Investment Management, US Cellular, Kraft, SC Johnson, Roosevelt University and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

Esther is the author of the book *Let the Story Do the Work: The Art of Storytelling for Business Success* and her work can be seen regularly on forbes.com, virgin.com, entrepreneur.com and ama.org.

An alumna of Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University as well as Texas A&M, Esther holds both an MBA and an MS in Higher Education. She is a lecturer with Northwestern Kellogg School of Management and the University of Zurich, and was recently a keynote speaker for United Airlines. She spent nearly half of her life in Hong Kong, the other half in the US, and has relatives on three continents. She lives in Chicago with her husband and two daughters.

Established in 1999, the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises (CFE) pioneered much of what is known about the collective challenges family businesses and their leaders and owners face, making CFE synonymous with new ways of thinking about the ownership and leadership of family enterprises. Professor John Ward, along with founder Lloyd Shefsky and numerous faculty and staff aligned with CFE, developed CFE into a world-class teaching and research center that provides cutting-edge thinking and guidance for family business purpose, vision and strategy, governance, leadership, succession, entrepreneurship in family business, family engagement and cohesion and family business culture.

CFE has built a collaborative family business "community" among Kellogg students, faculty, alumni and family business scholars, and has developed a global network of successful business families who can learn from - and connect with - each other to generate innovative solutions to current and emerging challenges faced by family enterprises. CFE also creates unparalleled executive programs and conferences to drive strategic conversations about innovations and best practices in the field of family enterprise.

Renamed the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises in 2020, CFE today is in a unique position to transform the decision-making and strategic thinking of future generations of family enterprise leaders. CFE is dedicated to producing rigorous and relevant research into the unique demands, strengths and evolutionary paths of family enterprises. Results of this research are delivered in the classrooms to all ages of family business leaders.

In addition to our focus on the complexities of family enterprise leadership, governance and strategy, we integrate Northwestern University's and the Kellogg School of Management's authoritative expertise into our curriculum to create a world-class, comprehensive, cross-discipline family enterprise resource. Our fusion of this deep academic capability with knowledge gleaned from our global community of high-impact business-owning families helps create CFE's unique theory-driven, evidence-based frameworks.

CFE has a three-pronged approach:

- Providing MBA curriculum and programming for students who are part of a family business, as well as students interested in the fields of private equity and venture capital;
- Offering executive education courses such as "Leading Family Enterprises," "Governing Family Enterprises," and "Family Enterprise Boards: A Program for Current and Prospective Directors";

- Conducting groundbreaking research to better understand the challenges facing business families.