

**A HARD RESET ON PURPOSE FOR FAMILY BUSINESS:
ADAM FARVER OF PELLA CORPORATION**

Adam Farver:

When I was in the ICU, the neurologic ICU, I couldn't move, I couldn't talk, but I could actually hear and understand. And there was one point when two doctors were talking to my wife at the foot of the bed, they didn't think I could hear or understand, but they were telling her, "Yes, he survived, but there's a high likelihood that he's going to remain in this vegetative state and be in a wheelchair, require a feeding tube. So, you'll have to think about your life and getting your affairs in order for that."

And I remember that clearly, and I remember thinking, no, I am going to recover.

Esther Choy:

Over the past five episodes in Season 2, we've heard multiple stories on purpose. How purpose can be your North Star in situations fraught with moral complexity. How setting purpose as a new generation of owners guides their life's choices as well as those of their family enterprise. But a story we haven't heard so far is what could happen to your personal purpose when a near fatal crisis strikes, out of nowhere.

Hi, this is Esther Choy, the executive producer and your host of the John L. Ward 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.

Together with our show's advisor professor Jennifer Pendergast at Kellogg's Ward Center, and guest expert, Dave Whorton, CEO and founder of the Tugboat Group, we continue to focus on purpose in this last episode of Season 2.

And our main guest is someone you have heard from in Season 1. That's Adam Farver. Why are we asking Adam to come back already to Season 2? Because something terrible happened to him a few months after my interview with him last year.

But first, let's do a quick recap. Who's Adam?

Adam Farver:

My name is Adam Paul Farver. I currently serve as chairman of the board of Pella Corporation, fourth-generation owner of the family company.

Very simply, we make windows and doors for homes and commercial projects including hotels, some stores. So, across the nation, 99% of our sales are in the United States and 100% of our manufacturing is here. And that is what we do.

Esther Choy:

That's what Pella Corporation sells and what Adam's role is at Pella. But. What does a chairman of the

board actually do? In order to fully appreciate this story, it's important for us to level set, and first gain an appreciation for the complexity of the work of a chairman.

Adam Farver:

My role is to facilitate interaction, and support each of the three legs of our governance stool which is the shareholder family, the board of directors and the management team. So, my primary purpose is to run the board of directors. We have a majority of independent directors. I interact with each of them, work with the management team to set the agenda and conduct our board meetings so that the board of directors is a highly beneficial strategic asset for the company. And then my role is also to interact with the shareholders, to really be the key liaison between the shareholder family and the company.

The board of directors serves as the representatives of the shareholders. So, working to make sure the shareholders know that the board is serving well for that goal, and then to interact with the management team as well, in terms of the management team's interaction with the board of directors and the management team's interactions with the family to keep the family updated on what's happening in the business. So, spinning those three plates all the time, focusing on each one, and I've learned a lot over the last few years about the importance of keeping them separate, but keeping them completely plugged in, aligned and engaged. So, in a nutshell, that's what the chairman role is.

Esther Choy:

I remember clearly interviewing Adam spring last year, 2020, and we had a lively and engaging conversation. Then a few months later, through a mutual colleague, I heard Adam got into a big, life-threatening accident. What happened to him that landed him in the neurologic intensive care unit?

Adam Farver:

I was donating blood to the local children's hospital last summer; they were in dire need of donations because of COVID. So, I happily agreed, went and donated blood, did it a bunch of times before but this time was unique because I passed out after the donation and some nurses found me walking around stumbling, were good enough to figure out there was something very wrong, figure out I'd just donated blood and put me in an ambulance and took me to the hospital next door. Thankfully, the doctors very quickly identified that I had hit my head hard and they rushed me into brain surgery. Because there was significant damage and ended up on life support in a coma for two weeks because of how severe that head injury was.

In the depths of my recovery, it was dark.

It was the hardest thing I have ever gone through and I had two significant fears in that lonely darkness. One was, I was very scared I was going to be a burden on my family. I knew that they would support me whatever happened, but the idea of being in a wheelchair highly disabled, not able to function fully was a deep fear that I had at the time. And the second one was that I would not be able to re earn the privilege of serving as chairman.

When I was in the ICU, the neurologic ICU, I couldn't move, I couldn't talk, but I could actually hear and understand. And there was one point when two doctors were talking to my wife at the foot of the bed, they didn't think I could hear or understand, but they were telling her, "Yes, he survived, but there's a high likelihood that he's going to remain in this vegetative state and be in a wheelchair, require a feeding tube. So, you'll have to think about your life and getting your affairs in order for that."

And I remember that clearly, and I remember thinking, no, I am going to recover.

One really interesting thing about the process of recovery was I had to go through a second brain surgery to actually re-install, reinsert the portion of my skull, which is about the size of a small dish plate, and that surgery was scary.

Jennifer Pendergast:

Crises either pull people together or pull them apart depending on what their relationship is.

Esther Choy:

That is Professor Jennifer Pendergast, executive director of Kellogg's John L Ward Center for Family Enterprises.

Jennifer Pendergast:

I think fundamentally, if people have done the hard work to define their purpose and that they are united in a desire to achieve something bigger than themselves, that typically an event like that would pull them together rather than pull them apart.

Esther Choy:

In the midst of Adam fighting for his life and recovery, how did it impact Pella, especially given his critical leadership role as the board chair? Has Pella done the hard work to define its purpose? Did Adam's injury pull people at Pella apart, or pull them together?

Here's Adam again.

Adam Farver:

Fortunately for us, our purpose was defined at our company's founding by my great grandfather. Our purpose is to create great jobs. That is why he founded the company.

It wasn't because he wanted to make windows and doors. Actually, the company was founded on an invention which is a roll screen. A screen that rolls up and down out of the way when you need it or don't need it, but what he realized was the small town in Iowa where our company is based, because of what was happening in the industrial revolution, we were going to need a manufacturing company to create jobs otherwise the town would decline. So that's why he started it. And he started out very methodically, making it all about the people, creating really good jobs, and that's what he talked about. So, one of my favorite quotes of his is, "Ultimately our success depends on each member of the Pella team, a group of strong individuals treated with dignity and respect, who share the same vision shall be a force nothing can deter." Wow. Right? That encapsulates.

I've learned so much about this through the injury and the recovery, how important family is and actually extend family all the way to the company as well. Every team member of our company is effectively a member of our family. The tidal wave of support I received through the recovery. One, I received hundreds of cards from team members across the organization. So many that when I left the hospital, it was two big paper grocery bags full of cards, which were great. More importantly, I could feel the thoughts and prayers that were coming my way. I know it sounds crazy. I can't even really describe it, but in my heart and soul, I could feel people pulling for me. That was effectively a lifeline that I

grabbed onto and held onto, and they pulled me back. That support is hard to even describe in terms of the power of it.

A couple of the things my grandmother always said to me that I'll never forget is happiness is a choice and love is a verb. So, that's what's really so important about family, is that love is a verb. It's not a feeling. It is what you do. And the fact that families will organize, circle and support the way they did for me demonstrates the incredible power of family. How important that is and how it is a debt that I can never repay, but I'm going to try hard to.

Esther Choy:

Happiness is a choice; love is a verb. Love is not so much a feeling as it is what we choose to do, for ourselves, and for each other, and especially in times of crisis.

It's because of Adam's choice and action that has helped him recover. It's also because of his choice and action that helped him redefine his personal purpose. So, what was the recovery process like?

Adam Farver:

It was basically a control-alt-delete in terms of my operating system, which was fascinating, very fortunate to have recovered all the necessary faculties, but it was just an amazing experience to go back to square zero in terms of what I thought about life. What my purpose in life is, what I think about, how I think about it and to really have a complete restart in terms of everything.

Esther Choy:

A lot of times people having gone through a really traumatic experience and recovered and thank God you have, things shifted, changed, looked different, felt different to them. So, in your case, what's different?

Adam Farver:

Big time. Great question, and a very appropriate question for this conversation because the answer really comes down to purpose. That is one of the biggest things I've found through the arduous journey of my recovery was a renewed sense and a new definition of purpose.

If you had asked me before the injury, if you'd given me truth serum or somehow hypnotized me into telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth, I would have said in response though to the question of what is your purpose, that it was one word, win. To the core, that was my one purpose, was winning. And if somebody said, "You mean more than your family?" Yes. If I win, everything will be totally fine for my family.

I've always cared a lot about people and had good intentions with goals, but when it came down to it, I defined my purpose with the sole aspect of achievement.

In the recovery, it was a very dark, difficult, lonely time, especially in the middle of the night. Lying at that bed all alone with monitors there blinking and beeping and nurses checking on me all the time, which I really appreciated and I'm very thankful for, but I was awake.

And so, I'm lying there in bed, not being able to move with all these different things going on, I would try to take my mind to a different place. And what I ended up doing was having imaginary conversations,

effectively praying to my grandmother, who was my hero and who I admire and who I knew could tell me what to do and how to think to maximize my recovery.

And so, in those imaginary conversations in my head, those prayers to my grandmother, I started to think through what she would say and think about things through her perspective. And I reflected on the aspect of being so focused on winning that I was sacrificing a lot in my life to try to achieve those goals.

And so, I reoriented, and thought about what she would say. I thought a lot about her behavior, who she was as a person, how she acted, and I distilled it down into three things.

Three words to represent my new purpose in life, and those three words are gratitude, grace and gumption. Those are the three things that I thought I admired most about my grandmother and what I really wanted to employ in terms of my behavior.

Esther Choy:

Gratitude, grace, and gumption. Those are big words indeed. When we return, let's have Adam break each of them down for us.

Welcome back! If you've been enjoying listening to all the stories you've heard on our podcast Family IN Business, then please consider rating us and writing a review on your preferred podcast listening platform. It really helps others find us.

Back to Adam's story. What does gratitude, grace and gumption mean to him?

Adam Farver:

So, gratitude. Before I thought a lot about gratitude but I never really appreciated the full meaning of the word in terms of its importance in my life and sense of purpose. So before in my life, there were all sorts of things that I felt like were kind of a drag, right? Like walking the dog every morning for an example. And when I was in the hospital lying in bed, I thought about how much I wanted to take my dog out for a walk again and appreciate everything. Every season, every day of every season, right? The joy of feeling the snow crunch under your boots or the joy of this time of year. And so, this morning on my walk with the dog, there was a full moon and the moon over the mountains was just gorgeous.

Esther Choy:

What about grace and gumption?

Adam Farver:

Yeah, so grace is a hard one. So, if you think about what the word really means, it is how you act and how you interact with people. And before, I would have some temper issues. When I was younger, I really did. But I would find myself getting upset and angry. And one of the things I thought about in recovery was what it means to be graceful is really thinking hard about your interaction with everyone all the time. And so, I started in the hospital, practicing it with every nurse, therapist, staff member of the hospital, my interactions with them, practicing grace in terms of making it about them, right? Thanking them for everything that they do and commenting, having interactions and really focusing on being nice and interactive and an interesting person to talk to.

And I've carried that forward in terms of all my interactions with everyone, even people with whom I disagree or I'm in a negotiation with, I go back to that aspect of grace and thinking about every interaction, every word that I say, every word that I write really matters and taking ownership of every single one of those things is what it means to me to be graceful. My grandmother did it in an amazing way just in terms of her presence, right? And so that's one thing I kind of associate with grace.

Esther Choy:

How about gumption?

Adam Farver:

Gumption is about deciding on goals and sticking with them. So, it's sort of my iteration of what winning was before. From it being about the end result, it's about grit and determination. And I thought about the difference between the two words, grit and gumption. Those were kind of the two finalists for that last spot in the three G's, and I decided on gumption because it just feels more positive and all-encompassing than just grit, right? Grit is sort of your ability to be determined. To gumption is much more about, I think to me, finding the needs, finding the problems to solve and then setting the necessary goals to implement, think about, find, help work with others to find solutions to things and getting them done.

Esther Choy:

You don't wish something like that upon anyone. But what if someone were on a single-minded track, we're talking about focus and determination and dedication to your goals and their underlying drive is winning. What would it take, not a major accident, for them to reevaluate their purpose?

Adam Farver:

Sure. Great question. I thought a lot about that. And I'll start with self-reflection and self-actualization. In terms of being solely focused on winning, you don't have to have a brain injury to do a hard reset. It is all about self-reflection and reading a lot of stuff, and thinking about your life's purpose. What's most important to you? Who are the people that you idealize or respect the most in terms of their accomplishments? More importantly, how it was accomplished. And if you go through that daily and really think about those things, even for three minutes a day, it matters.

One of the things I found in recovery, one of the gifts that people gave me, were daily prayer books and a daily stoic book with different reflections. And it's just like, seriously, three minutes a day that you can take to step back and think about some of these big issues with the advice given to them, think about that throughout the day, and it's just like anything physically health wise. Mentally that really starts to shape your thinking and can put you in a different direction that you're happier about.

Esther Choy:

Three minutes a day. That sounds doable. In fact, easy. But is it really? When people are driven to win, and being very focused on achieving, it's like they're riding on a bullet train that's never fast enough. Often, it can be unrealistic to ask them to pause, even for three minutes, to completely switch gears, and to think about their life's purpose.

So, if you are someone who might have a hard time finding that three-minutes a day to reflect, what could you do?

Dave Whorton:

I don't think you have to throw yourself in front of a car and injure yourself to determine what your purpose is.

Esther's narration

That's Dave Whorton, CEO and founder of the Tugboat Group. We've relied on many of his insights in previous episodes before.

Dave Whorton:

You have to leave room for reflection.

Whether you're 20 years old, 30 years old, 40 years old, 50, 60, 70, I don't care. It could be even in your 90s, perhaps you have an epiphany, right? And that would be wonderful too. But it's not something to be forced but it's something to be a journey. And unless something happens, like what happened to Adam which you can't predict, nor do you want to try to cause, I think you have to take more ownership of yourself. In our society everything's so cluttered. And everything is so available. With the smartphones, your ability to be connected into all kinds of social media, to be checking news, to be checking email. I mean, you literally can make sure there's not a single moment in the day where you're not working, eating, communicating, or reviewing information. So where is that space to be reflective?

The biggest mistake people make today is they don't treat vacations like vacations. They treat vacations as half work weeks. And I've heard people say, "I'm so proud. I get up at four in the morning in Hawaii, and I work for the first four hours before my wife and kids wake up. And then I'm kind of on to my day."

And I thought, "What a shame." Because one, in those four hours you're completely in work mode. And we know how this works, you don't turn it off when you turn off your computer. You're still processing what was an email in those conversations for the rest of the afternoon. And so, one thing I would strongly suggest, and we do this at Tugboat, is you have to take at least a week a year, in which you turn everything off. It's all off. You're not checking email; you're not checking for... If we need to get ahold of you, we will fax you. If the hotel or place has a fax machine. If not, we'll send a carrier pigeon. But you've got to be able to allow yourself to unplug and hopefully give yourself some energy and then perhaps find those moments like I did on those hikes and those bike rides, for some kind of deeper thoughts about kind of where you are, where you want to be in the world, in the future.

Esther Choy:

Whether it's three-minutes a day, or a week per year, the lesson here is to find dedicated time to unplug and unglue yourself from the world around you so you can have the mental and emotional space to reflect.

And as you reflect, write your reflection down. Record it. Your future self will thank you profusely. Here's Adam's take right before his second brain surgery, the one where the surgeons had to re-install part of his skull the size of a small dish plate.

Adam Farver:

And what I was really nervous about was somehow forgetting everything that I had learned thus far in my recovery and that all the work I'd been doing in terms of the self-reflection, self-actualization and

discovery of the purpose I wanted to achieve, I would somehow forget, not remember, and I would go right back to being my old self instead of the improved one that I already felt I had achieved.

And so, I wrote myself letters for after the operation just in case I couldn't remember it. And that process of writing myself letters about everything I had learned was great. And I still have those and I'm so thankful that I have that memento of the memories and the process that I went through to arrive at those three key things of gratitude, grace and gumption.

Esther Choy:

It's a gross understatement that Adam's recovery involves an outsized determination and a lot of hard work. But in Adam's own words, this involuntary reset, this control-alt-delete event prompted him to rethink his life's purpose. Then, how can business owning families proactively think about **RESETTING** without waiting for a major crisis to do so?

There must be something that all families who are IN business together can do to ready themselves and prepare themselves to handle crisis. What are they? Here's Jennifer again.

Jennifer Pendergast:

I think a couple of things. One an inherent foundation of trust is important. Oftentimes, in a time of crisis, we can't be super consensus-driven and, "Let me get everybody's input and buy-in and make sure that we're completely transparent in our communication.

You don't always have those opportunities at a time like that. If you build trust within an organization that I believe Esther, as my leader has our best intentions at heart, and I'm just going to follow her and not second guess what she's doing, that's really important in a time of crisis. There are actions you can take to build trust. It's about over communicating, and being transparent and listening, and being empathetic. All the things that work to build trust.

Trust is one thing. The other thing is building the muscle of decision-making together. When you're not in a crisis, give yourself opportunities to work together as a group to come to consensus on things that may not be super easy to come to consensus on.

Any time you write a policy together or come to some agreement about something related to your strategy or your business, or even developing something like a value statement, all of those are opportunities to work together towards a common goal that are going to require give and take, and are going to require consensus.

Being able to do that and learn how to do that effectively, it's a whole lot easier in a time of crisis where you've got to come together. What you don't want in a time of crisis is, "We need to make this critical decision. We're going to close this plant or we're going to stop paying a distribution to the family. We're going to put in an employee relief fund," or whatever that may be. We've never had to make a hard decision together.

Typically, it's good to escalate and practice some smaller ones before, so by the time you get to the big one you understand how people make decisions and you've developed a good process, and structure to do that as well.

I think there's value in conversation about what is our purpose. I find that when, as an example, I'll ask families, what is the purpose of your wealth? Why do we choose to do this together? A lot of people haven't thought about it because they never proactively chose to do it together because they're the fourth-generation owner of something, and they inherited it.

They didn't come with their money to a window and say, "I'll buy this company." They don't think about why do we choose to, but you are proactively choosing. To me, that's a bit of a reset is thinking around, "This is an option. We're choosing to do this together. Let's proactively choose." It's almost like restating your marriage vows like, "I'm choosing you again."

Every morning I choose you because I get up and I'm still here. What I proactively say, "No, I choose to be part of this." One of my dear friends and colleagues from consulting years ago said that families should ask themselves, "Are we buyers or sellers?" That if you couldn't say you wanted to be a buyer, I wouldn't put my money down to opt into this, then you need to rethink, why are we doing this together?

I think that question both individually and communally of what gives us energy is being part of this something that gives us energy or depletes energy. If it's not a positive, if we're adding up the positives and the negatives, then we need to rethink why we're doing it. I think that to me is the ultimate reset.

Adam Farver:

People often say it's a miracle, which I really appreciate and hear, but to me it wasn't.

Esther Choy:

Adam is referring to his complete recovery from a dire injury that had led the doctors to advise his wife that he would be far, far from returning to his normal, healthy self.

The recovery seemed like a miracle. But it wasn't to Adam.

Adam Farver:

It was reality. And I could identify exactly what went on in terms of the amazing care I received from the incredible surgeons, doctors, therapists, nurses, everyone involved, and then the support of friends, family, and community were the reality that that brought me back. And yes, I'm very glad, very fortunate, incredibly lucky. And there is definitely a higher power very much involved, but it is not miraculous. It is a proof point for the importance of each of those factors in terms of everything we do.

Esther Choy:

It's not a miracle. Yes, Adam's recovery is indeed a combination of luck, top-notch medical care, AND a lot of important factors such as having the foundation of purpose set by his great grandfather, a purpose that is beyond any one person. In Adam's stories as well as all of our guests in season 2, it is the "active choosing" that binds the family together.

So, what have you and your family enterprise done to prepare for the inevitable? Family IN Business are in this journey for the long haul. And in the long run, some kind of crisis and disasters, man-made or natural, WILL strike.

When it happens, will you be ready? Have you and your collective done the necessary work to set and sometimes reset your purpose?

We're coming to a close on Season 2: On Purpose. Throughout the season, you've heard six stories, each with a very particular angle on why purpose is important to family enterprises and to you, leaders and families who transform them. I hope you will soon begin the worthwhile and hard work of finding, defining, and pursuing your purpose.

By the way, what do you think should be our focus for Season 3? Do you know of a family enterprise leader whose story we must share? If so, reach out to us at familyenterprises@kellogg.northwestern.edu.

Even if you don't have any ideas yet, check out our incredibly deep vault of resources, in the form of articles, research, videos, recorded conferences and of course podcast at WardCenter.Net

Thank you for tuning into Family IN Business, a podcast sponsored by the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises. Thank you, Adam Farver, Chairman of the board at Pella Corporation. We wish you nothing but robust health and happiness. And of course, we're so delighted to have learned from Dave Whorton, as well as all the guest experts who've shared their insights for Season 2, Dave Evans, Brooke Vuckovic and Rob Lachenauer.

Our show is supported and advised by Dr. Jennifer Pendergast, executive director of Kellogg's Ward Center for Family Enterprises. Kane Power is our podcast engineer. And, I'm Esther Choy, an adjunct lecturer at the Kellogg's Ward Center, Founder of Leadership Story Lab, and author of the book *Let the Story Do the Work*.

Take care, stay safe and healthy. We look forward to sharing more stories with you in Season 3 in 2022!

Esther Choy is the President and Chief Story Facilitator of [Leadership Story Lab](#), where she teaches business storytelling to organizations and professionals who are searching for more meaningful ways to connect with their audiences. Leaders trained in storytelling find compelling narratives to communicate authentically, inspire others, and create unimagined, lasting impact.

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, she and her team have served clients across industries, including United Airlines, Tyson Foods, ZS, McCormick Foundation, Brookfield Asset Management, Adyen, Moore, US Cellular, SC Johnson and PayNet, an Equifax Company.

Esther is the author of the book [Let the Story Do the Work: The Art of Storytelling for Business Success](#). Her work appears regularly on forbes.com, virgin.com, entrepreneur.com, and ama.org. Her podcast, Family IN Business, is sponsored by the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises at the Kellogg School of Management, where she also holds an adjunct lecturer appointment. She is a graduate of Kellogg, as well as Texas A&M, holding an MBA from the former and MS in Higher Education from the latter.

Esther spent nearly half her life in Hong Kong, and now lives in Chicago with her husband and two daughters.

Established in 1999, the [John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises](#) pioneered much of what is known about the collective challenges that family businesses and their leaders and owners face, making the Ward Center synonymous with new ways of thinking about the ownership and leadership of family enterprises. Clinical Professor Emeritus John Ward, along with co-founder Lloyd Shefsky and numerous faculty and staff aligned with the Ward Center, developed 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.

The Ward Center 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. The Ward Center 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, the center today is in a unique position to transform the decision-making and strategic thinking of future generations of family enterprise leaders. The Ward Center 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 the Ward Center's unique theory-driven, evidence-based frameworks.

The Ward Center 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 that cover the full gamut of family enterprise management issues including family business strategy, governance, succession planning, entrepreneurship, family offices and family business culture
- Conducting groundbreaking research, both academic and practitioner-based, to better understand the challenges facing business families