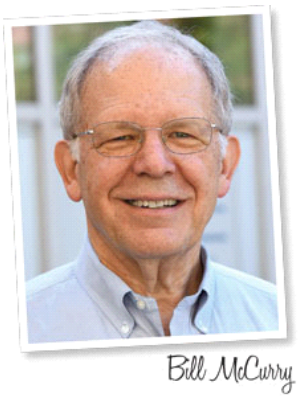
greenPROFIT

Profit

6/1/2026

Asking Your Advice

Bill McCurry



A real world challenge called, saying he was “Midwestern nice,” but also clearly frustrated.

“I’m a young 64 and not ready to retire,” Fred said. “I’m trying to build a management team, but support for my new manager, Suzy, is eroding. She’s great and isn’t intimidated by the lack of support, especially from my partner’s son, George.”

Fred explained that George’s father, now retired, is his “silent” partner. He takes no money from the business, but requires his almost 40-year-old son, who’s never worked elsewhere, remain employed. A huge mistake, Fred and his partner never created a buy/sell agreement. Now his partner refuses to sell. He knows Fred, as a sole owner, would likely let George go.

> **Garden Center AI Update**
> April’s column told about adoption of AI in various roles within Deb’s Greenhouse (Morinville, Alberta, Canada). Since then, Deb launched an AI phone virtual assistant. It’s all verbal, pressing any numbers. Besides questions like hours and location, it also answers inventory questions. If it can’t answer your questions, it offers to take messages for return calls. Give a call to (825) 526-3327 to ask if your favorite plant is in stock. Be appreciative of Deb’s offer—don’t clog the phone lines during Mountain Time retail hours.

For years, Fred has tried to assign new duties, which George eagerly accepts, but rarely follows through on. Fred nags him to complete even basic tasks.

Besides ignoring multiple assigned management responsibilities, George also sides with staff against Suzy. He even complains about her, like saying, “When we’re busy, she should help unload trucks or work with customers.”

Actually, Suzy does exactly that, and then stays late to complete her administrative work. Nevertheless, George frequently criticizes her in front of employees.

The stress is taking a toll. While he and his wife have enough retirement savings to retire, Fred still enjoys working, engaging with customers and watching his team succeed.

“What can I do with the favored son?” Fred asked.

I appreciate calls like this because they keep me grounded in real-world challenges. Retail problems rarely have simple, black-and-white solutions.
The first step I suggested was to sit down with George and say: “I’d like you to become an assistant manager with specific responsibility for this section of the store.”

Those responsibilities should be simple, visible tasks everyone can clearly recognize as done or not done.

Fred could continue: “You’ll be one of two assistant managers. The management team will include Suzy, you, Mary (the other assistant manager) and me. At weekly meetings, we’ll air frustrations and build our actions for the continued growth of the company. Outside of those meetings, we’ll present a united front. We’ll support company policies wholeheartedly, even when we disagree. Debate happens privately—never in front of staff.”

Then Fred must be clear. “If you can’t support the management team, I’ll take that as your decision to step out of management. That would mean a change in title and possibly your hours.”

If George continues to undermine leadership, Fred faces a major decision. Does he walk away as the operating partner, likely winding down and liquidating the business? That’s the nuclear option, but it may be preferable to stressing himself into a heart attack, which would also close the business.

Besides George, the key player is the silent partner who won’t change his position until the pain of keeping George employed exceeds the pain of change. While it’s uncomfortable to imagine your son unemployed, how much more uncomfortable is it for a 50-year-old business to close because your son drove out the operating partner?

There are many possible approaches. I’d love to hear readers’ suggestions for this situation. Please email or call with your thoughts. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.