



## Jack's Blend

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**Q.** My mom and I went into business together about three years ago. She was the financial backer to what was mostly my dream. My mom provided all the capital and I provided the "sweat equity."

I'm thankful for the help she gave me, but am now at a point where I feel like her involvement is becoming a detriment. I continue to learn and grow as a barista, a coffee person and a business person. She doesn't have the long-haul mentality I do and is especially nervous because of the economy and what is happening with Starbucks. She hasn't said anything specific, but sometimes her talk makes me wonder if she is going to pull the plug on the business.

What should I do? Should I buy the business from her (I don't have the cash to buy her out), or should I try to convince her that everything is going to be OK?

—Thanks, Anonymous

**A.** I'm going to make some assumptions before I start. First, I assume your mom either had cash in the bank or took out a loan for you. Either way she is in charge (the borrower is servant to the lender). Second, from what you said in your question, I pick up that your mom is being a pain in the coffee bar. Third, you must be making money, paying your wage and paying back debt, just not as fast as mom would like to see.

First, there's the issue of a partnership. Whether you and your mom have a formal partnership agreement or not, you are partners. You run the place, but are limited to what mom says is OK. You want to add a new menu item and she makes a remark about not having paid off the current debt. You say this will help us make more money. She says your last idea hasn't paid back as well as you thought it would, what make's you sure this one will? Ahh, partnerships.

Second, there is the issue of being in a partnership ... with family. Take the last paragraph, add a dash of "I powdered your butt, so I know better," and a sprinkle of "I'm not a kid anymore," and you have a recipe for the inheritance going to a poodle.

Third, and possibly the worst, you have one person pulling in the direction of success and the other a stick in the mud. You have a kingdom divided. You have the classic reason I

hate partnerships — division. This business situation must change or it will destroy your business and your relationship with your mom. There is no business, no amount of money that is more important than family. You need to step up and do what it takes to change this. You need to grow your business and let your mom become a customer, nothing more.

I recommend you go to a local bank with ties to the community and a record of working with small businesses and take out a loan to pay off your mom. You've been in business for three years and are making money, so it shouldn't be hard to persuade a banker to make the loan. At the same time, secure an additional amount above the payoff to your mom to improve your business.

When that's done, go to your mom and hand her a check. Tell her how much you appreciate her belief in you. Thank her for being the one to make your business happen and without her you wouldn't have been able to get started. Then tell her your feelings about how you believe in the coffee industry: how you see a bright future, a good deal of opportunity and growth in your business. Tell her you don't want her to risk her nest egg tied up in something that could fail. Tell her you need to step out on your own for the future of the business and your success as an individual.

Although she may be hurt in the short run, I believe she'll be proud of you in the long run. And the greatest thing, though she doesn't see it now, is you may have just insured your kids, her grandkids, will have a great time at grandma's house.

One final note, last month's column addressed a question about Starbucks®, its slowdown and what it means to us, the independent retailer. I responded with my thoughts and experiences as a retailer in Michigan, but would like to hear from you. The goal of this column has always been to inform, educate and help all in the coffee industry. But my experience is my experience. I would like questions and/or comments from you about life as an independent retailer in the coffee business, about how things are going in your area and what you want to accomplish in the future. Thanks!

*Note: The opinions expressed in the above column are those of the writer and do not represent the opinions of this magazine or any of its staff.*