

Multi-Generation Agencies...

Strong Foundations, Fresh Thinking



Jeff Mooers
H.D. Mooers and Company



Jerry C. Thomas
J.L. Thomas & Company



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J.L. Thomas & Company

Q

What is your advice regarding the issues of transition of ownership and of leadership within a multi-generation general agency?

Mooers

Don't wait until somebody's dead. Makes it harder to get signatures.

Transition in a family business can be delicate. Each situation is unique, and should be handled as such. I'm a third generation principal here—my grandfather started the agency, handed it over to my uncle and my dad, and here I am today. In one way we've been lucky. My dad and my uncle were amazing partners, and while I have two siblings—both brothers, one older, one younger—they never expressed any interest in the family firm. That has worked out, because while I love them both, they bug the daylight out of me.

The ownership structure here has struggled as well. I'd do what we failed to do—keep it clean. A family business can be a small or large part of an estate. What's fair isn't always right, and vice versa. Clean it up while all parties are able to participate, intellectually and emotionally.

Thomas

Transparency and communication is fundamental in the transfer of leadership within a multi-generation family business. We have always tried to keep everything fair, which is why there is no one person listed as the sole President and CEO. Taking a team approach within the family has really helped us for three generations.

Q

What steps does your agency take to maintain, respect and accommodate "old school" long-standing producer relationships?

Mooers

My uncle, the ubiquitous Douglas Mooers, retired the day I got there and urged me not to take it personally. I thought it worked out nicely, because I had a nice desk on day one and I got to pretend I was the boss until about lunch.

My dad and I worked side by side, literally, until he died in 2005. I'll never be able to really explain all I learned from my dad; not

about business (he used to share his business motto, "ignorance is bliss", with anybody who would listen) but about relationships.

I remember coming in for the first time after he was gone, and it was like I was seeing the office, and the business, for the first time. I set to work at becoming my dad and failed. Repeatedly.

We lost some brokers.

Then I quit trying to be him and decided to be myself. We lost more.

Today, I keep clawing back. We enjoy dozens of relationships that go back beyond my time here, and that's more than 25 years.

Oh dear. I'm old.

Thomas

We obviously strive for electronic applications and simplified underwriting processes. However, we don't try to completely overhaul the way a producer conducts his or her business. Our reps will mention newer ways of submitting business and newer product types, but at the end of the day we respect the way producers want to write their business.

Q

What are some key ways the thinking of the younger generation has been instrumental in the growth of your agency?

Mooers

I'll never forget going back and forth with my dad about joining an Independent Marketing Group (IMO). He was convinced we'd lose our autonomy, and the Mooers name had earned a respected place in the industry. He kept coming up with reasons it wouldn't work. I finally did it, without his blessing, and when he saw the first bonus check he very nearly smiled.

I think any infusion of youth, and energy, and perspective, is a plus. Not everything shiny should be grabbed, but we are fortunate to be in an industry where opportunities never stop presenting themselves. Agility and open-mindedness are critical.

Thomas

Implementing innovative technology and processes have helped the growth of our agency. Additionally, we market our young staff as a reason to do business with us. One thing that I can provide (Kurt, 29-years old) that a 60-year old agent cannot always provide is lifelong service and being there come claim time.



What "old" is still essential, what "new" is inevitable and how does your agency build for the future?

Mooers

This industry will never not be *people*—as much as we may try to automate it. We share stories and we relate experiences. We get to help people—from the heart—who deserve help.

A machine has never really done me a favor. And I need a lot of favors.

I'll admit, personally, I'm slow to change. But that's not always a bad thing. We've all

seen the next great efficiency movement, followed by the trend that goes "back to the basics."

We really do just try to keep it simple.

Thomas

This is a relationship business and that won't ever change. Being in front of our producers and having face-to-face communication strengthens our producer relationships. We consistently need to provide our producers with current ideas to maintain relevance. We are building for the future by proactively marketing point of sale support. 🌐

H.D. Mooers and Company is a brokerage general agency in Lafayette, CA, providing brokers an opportunity to earn top commissions on a complete portfolio of products through proven insurance carriers. The agency is an impaired risk specialist and is one of the most respected names in the brokerage industry. Established in 1937 by Harrel Douglas "Hal" Mooers, H.D. Mooers and Company has grown to be one of the oldest and most respected agencies in the country.

Hal's two sons, Doug and Don, became the second generation to run the agency and were instrumental in the creation of the National Association of Independent Life Brokerage Agencies (NAILBA), the industry's most important organization for BGAs, with Doug becoming the organization's first chairman. NAILBA's top honor, the Douglas Mooers Award for Excellence, is bestowed upon an individual deemed most committed to furthering independent life brokerage as a distribution system.

The third generation, Jeffrey D. Mooers,

signed on in 1990 and has run the agency since 2005. Coming full circle, Jeff has been named the 2018 chairman of NAILBA. Accomplished in his own right, Jeff was the recipient of NAILBA's Chairman's Award in 2012.

The agency serves as liaison between agents and home offices, representing dozens of leading carriers, and markets specialized products to thousands of agents. To find out more about H.D. Mooers and Company visit www.hd-mooers.com or contact Jeff Mooers by telephone at 925-283-7310. Email: jeffm@hd-mooers.com.

J.L. Thomas & Company is a family-owned insurance brokerage agency, now employing the third generation. Owned and operated in the heart of Playhouse Square, Cleveland's Theater District (second largest theater district in the United States), J.L. Thomas & Company was founded in 1971 by Jerry L. Thomas, CLU. Jerry's experience in the insurance business as both a personal producer and general agent gave him the insight to operate one of the country's most respected brokerage operations. Jerry's sons, J. Michael "Mike" Thomas, CLU, David D. Thomas, MSFS, CLU, ChFC, and Craig W. Thomas, have specialized skills that have fostered the company's growth and success. Currently the company is employing the third generation, Jerry C. Thomas and Kurt M. Thomas, CFP, CLU. Both are active in point of sale and management within the agency.

For more information about J.L. Thomas & Company, visit www.jlthomasco.com, or call 216-241-0680. Emails: Jerry@jlthomasco.com or Kurt@jlthomasco.com.