

## The Flanagan Group

*Brian, Barry and Tara Flanagan make up the second generation of the family owned Flanagan Group. In 1973, parents, Joe and Marie founded the group in Kildare town where they bought, refurbished and rebranded a local pub, now known as Silken Thomas. From there, the group expanded and now includes Lock 13 Gastropub, Sallins; restaurant, Chapter 16; guesthouse, Lord Edward; nightclub, Tigerlily; Silken Thomas and an Anglo Norman tower, the last from the original 13<sup>th</sup> Century Kildare Castle. The group employs over 100 staff.*

*Both generations are involved in the business (Joe is chairman of the group) with Brian, Barry and Tara actively involved in day to day operations. The CFB spoke with the three siblings about being next generation and making their unique mark on a thriving family business group.*



The Flanagan Group logo



Brian Flanagan

**Q: Did you receive encouragement from your parents to join the family business?**

**Brian, Manager of Silken Thomas:**

Yes and no. To me it was made clear that if I did not want to get involved in the family business that it would not be a problem, but it was also clear that if I did want to be involved, the necessary supports such as college/training and outside experience/exposure would be provided and encouraged. Basically there was no pressure to get involved in the family business, do what makes you happy was the mantra.

**Tara, Flanagan Group Projects Manager:**

I would say our parents encouraged us to forge our own path and it was made very clear from an early stage not to feel any pressure to get involved in the family business. If anything I would nearly think we were discouraged to get involved. The hospitality industry is tough and challenging at the best of times with long laborious hours while wearing a smile on your face.



**Barry Flanagan**

**Q: Would you describe your entry to the business a quick or gradual process? Why?**

**Barry, Manager of Lock 13 Gastropub:**

I would describe my entry into the family business as a quick process as we were undertaking a new project at the time. Just being fresh out of college with a BBS degree I was suddenly thrown into a Celtic Tiger business under the management of an employee who had worked in the family business for over 20 years. The business subsequently closed after three years of operation, but looking back, I learnt a lot of skills which have stood to me to this day.

**Q: As the newest generation, are you conscious of preserving your family's legacy while paving your own path forward?**

**Brian:** Of course! I view what I do now as carrying the baton for the next generation to take forward. I have my own ideas on how things should be done, but those ideas are cemented in the values passed on by my parents. I would love to see my children get involved over time but only if that's what makes them happy.



**Tara Flanagan**

**Q: Have your parents inspired you and your siblings to be entrepreneurial?**

**Tara:** I think 100% and that hasn't been deliberate. It's a natural result of being reared in a family business where dinner time becomes like a board meeting. It helped you develop analytical skills, debating skills (always handy at dinner time) and also leadership skills.

In 2011, during the height of the recession, I co-founded TL Marketing, an outsourced marketing consultancy firm. I remember at the time Dad being a concerned father saying: "Are you sure you want to leave your well paid job to do this? This recession is very challenging!" I responded with: "Isn't this exactly what you did in the 70's when you set up your business? When things were bad?" He couldn't come back on that one!

**Q: Communication is an essential part of passing on the family business from incumbent to incoming generation. Do you agree?**

**Brian:** Absolutely! Communication with regard to passing on the family business is a more recent occurrence but vitally important. It allows all parties concerned to move forward with greater clarity. It allows the business to grow with real continuity and prevents periods of uncertainty.

*"From partaking in classes with the DCU Centre for Family Business, we have understood that we should put all opinions out on the table so that an informed decision can be made going forward."*

—Barry Flanagan

**Q: How do you see yourself handling the next generation's involvement in the family business, granted the interest is there?**

**Brian:** I would love to think that the next generation has an interest in the family business in the future, but like my parents have done with us, there will be no pressure to do so. It's a tough enough industry as it is and if it's not for you then don't get involved. If there is a genuine interest to get involved, I would encourage a number of years spent outside of the business to gain experience in how others do it but also to gain important life experience.

**Barry:** If the interest is there from my children I would have no problem in encouraging them to be involved in the family business. Though, like my parents, I would want them to make sure that this is what they REALLY want to do. Like the Carton family's (Manor Farms) method, the knowledge that would be gained outside the family business would only prove invaluable for family business success.

**Tara:** If the interest is there then I think we would stipulate that they need to have a third level qualification as well as gain experience outside of the family business (at least 3-5 years). I think they should have held a managerial position before they enter the family business and as part of their induction they need to say what they will bring to the business and what their vision for the business is.