

Developing Capable Business Managers

The management skills and abilities of the younger generation need to be developed. In two-generation farming situations, the role of the parents is to help develop these management capabilities. This is essential for the future success of the farm business.

A two-generation farming operation provides a training ground for the younger party. It provides a safe environment where new skills and ideas can be tried. The skills and capabilities learned here will guide the business after the parents are gone.

Young people must be allowed to make meaningful contributions. Whenever we appreciate the contributions of the younger generation, no matter how small, we are helping them to see themselves as capable individuals.

Mistakes should be made now when they can be easily corrected rather than later when they may cause damage to the business. Remember, the outcome of a decision may not be as important as helping the younger party develop management skills and capabilities.

Below are five behaviors that can be used in the development of capable managers. These behaviors affirm and validate our belief in the management capabilities of the younger generation. You should practice these in your family. Are any of these behaviors present in your situation?

Checking Rather Than Assuming

By checking we learn how much understanding a person has and how capable he/she is. Checking aids in helping the young person develop management capabilities. Jeff's father says, "Son, what will you need to do before you take the truck?" When we take time to check, we are saying that we respect the fact that the person is capable of making decisions and experiencing personal growth.

Assuming is generally born out of expediency. It saves time to assume others will respond to specific experiences and then act in accordance with our assumptions. Jeff's dad says, "Don't forget to check the oil in the truck." The last time he forgot to check the oil was three years ago. But his father assumes that no management growth has taken place since then.

When we assume, we ignore the ability to learn and change from day-to-day. By assuming we say, "What you were yesterday is all that I will allow you to be today."

Wherever possible, use dialogue and patience rather than assuming. Ask the question, "How can I use this situation to check out what this person knows and is ready to learn?"

Exploring Rather Than Rescuing And Explaining

By exploring we learn how another person perceives a situation. We ask questions like: "What happened? What caused it to happen? What did you learn from the experience?" By exploring, we show confidence in the young person's capabilities to master situations and gain understanding.

Rescuers are those who step in to take care of things for others. We often rescue the younger person from management situations rather than allowing them to experience the consequences of their decisions. There is a prevailing belief that we develop good managers by explaining things to them. However, we are truly effective if we help them develop useful explanations for themselves. If we play the rescuer role, we send the younger generation into future business situations without the management tools necessary to effectively compete.

Page 2 File C4-75

Exploring helps people develop good judgment and build confidence in their abilities. Explaining delays the development of people's judgment skills as well as their sense of being capable.

Encouraging Rather Than Directing

People feel encouraged when we invite participation and contributions rather than directing and demanding compliance. When people are encouraged to contribute, they are generally willing, cooperative, and responsive. When we encourage people to explore possibilities, we help them develop positive attitudes toward learning from experiences, and even from failures.

Directing is born of expediency. It is much easier to direct others to do things our way than to allow them to do things their way. If we insist on telling people how to perform every detail of a task, we create feelings of hostility, aggression, and resistance. But when we ask people to contribute, they believe we feel they have something of value to offer.

Celebrating Success Rather Than Pointing Out Failure

People live up to (or down to) what we expect of them. So, if we want the younger person to be a capable manager, we should convey our expectations to them and provide them the freedom and support to meet our expectations. However, by expecting, we often set high standards and then point out the person's failure to meet these standards.

The problem is not with the standards but with the expectation of meeting the standards. The proper approach is to have high standards, but to realize that people will grow to meet these expectations in small incremental steps.

Too often we are preoccupied with what people have done wrong rather than celebrating what they have done right. When we celebrate any movement in the right direction, we are affirming and validating the other person and their newly acquired management capabilities. As a result, he/ she is often interested in doing more. It is easier to tame a fanatic than to put life into a corpse.

Respecting Rather Than Holding Accountable

Young people cannot gain wisdom as long as they are afraid to have an experience, or as long as we analyze it for them. If we insist on our superior knowledge, young people will be inhibited from gathering knowledge. By showing respect, we realize the uniqueness of each individual. If we do not show respect, we deny our diversity. Our uniqueness as individuals is our greatest value, both to ourselves and our family.

However, we often hold others accountable for having all of our expert knowledge. It refers to the bad habit of requiring others to read our minds and think the way we do. It makes others who fail to think, see, and understand exactly as we do to feel unacceptable by our standards.

For more information on making farm transitions work, visit the **Ag Decision Maker Transition and Estate Planning webpage**, www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdbusiness.html.

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