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## Personnel Management

# Effective Personnel Leadership

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Management, basically, is getting things done through people. People, therefore, are the most important resource available to management, and the leadership of people is one of the most important functions of management. This publication provides some basic personnel management guidelines which, if followed, should help the agribusiness manager become a more effective leader by creating alert, effective and responsible employees.

### Emphasize Skill, Not Rules

Judge your own actions and those of your employees by their effects — effects in terms of increasing both the competitive strength of your business and the satisfaction of the human needs of the people who work in it. Go easy on pat rules for running a business. Doing it "by the book" isn't always the most satisfactory way. If an unorthodox solution is effective and pleases the people who use it, don't just discount it.

### Set a High Standard

If you are irregular in your work habits, late for appointments, fuzzy in expressing yourself, careless about facts and bored in attitude, your employees probably will be, too. If, on the other hand, you set a high standard for the organization, in all probability your employees will be eager to follow your good example.

### Know Your Employees

Continuous study of individuals is a "must" in getting things done through people. Motives and attitudes are important tools for the manager, and they can be determined only by study. Since security

is the main drive in many people, giving recognition to the contribution of others and to their role in your concern is a useful starting point in getting the best from persons of future management caliber.

Individuals vary widely in their other characteristics. Well-timed praise may spur one person to new heights of achievement, but it may only inflate another. A better key to the latter's effort might be constructive criticism. A third individual may wilt under any kind of criticism, and some other approach is needed. The skillful manager constantly hunts for the appropriate procedure. He also searches beyond the office for background.

People's motives and attitudes are heavily conditioned by their personal situations. For this reason, tactful drawing-out of employees can often supply invaluable information for understanding them. Remember, people often act on the basis of emotional, nonlogical reasons, even though they try to appear completely logical.

### Objectives and a Sense of Direction

Employees should know where they're going, what they're doing and why they're doing it so they can plan their time intelligently and work effectively. Good employees seldom enjoy working just day to day. Therefore, make clear the relation between their day-to-day work and the larger company objectives.

For example, don't merely ask people to analyze the variable costs of a particular department. Tell them also that it's part of a longer-range plan to provide leeway for salary increases, and that the knowledge they provide will strengthen the operating efficiency of their company.



## Listening Pays

The manager who knows his people — their habits, worries, ambitions, touchy points and pet prides — comes to appreciate why they behave as they do and what motives stir them. The best and fastest way to know them is to encourage them to talk freely, without fear of ridicule or disapproval.

Try to understand how others actually feel on a subject, whether or not you feel the same way. Never dominate a conversation or meeting by doing all the talking yourself if you want to find out where your people stand. If both you and one of your people start to say something at the same time, give him the right of way.

One objection to the idea of being a good listener is that doing this takes time to draw out people. The answer is you need time to plan, too. Both are essential in the manager's job. The time invested will pay big dividends.

## Be Considerate

Few things contribute more to building a hard-working, effective team than a considerate boss. Try to be calm and courteous toward your employees. Consider the effects on them of any decisions you make. Take into account the problems they have of their own — both business and personal. Try to build up their pride in their work and their self-respect. Start by treating personal characteristics as assets and by being careful not to trample on them.

## Be Consistent

If you "fly off the handle" and "set off fireworks," you are likely to frighten employees into their shells; if you oscillate widely in reaction, mood and manner, you will probably bewilder them. Neither sort of behavior can win you the confidence and cooperation of your employees which you must have to get things done.

You and your employees are in the position of a leader and his followers. Employees want to follow only the leader whose course is steady and whose actions are predictable.

## Stress Job Importance

Most people need to think their jobs are important. Many even have to feel that they not only have an important job but that they are essential in it before they start clicking.

## Request Rather Than Command

Give your directions in terms of suggestions or requests. If your people have initiative and ability, you will get vastly better results in this way than you will by giving orders or commands. Issue commands only as a last resort. If you find that you have to give

orders all the time, maybe you'd better look for some new employees — or reexamine the way you have been handling your own job.

Be sure also to tell why you want certain things done. Informal, oral explanations are often as good or better than written ones; let the individual circumstances be your guide here.

## Delegate Responsibility

This is another "obvious" point that is frequently overlooked. Delegating responsibility is basic to competent management. You are not doing your real job as a manager if you do not delegate. If you insist on keeping your hand in details, you discourage your assistants by competing with them. Moreover, by doing everything yourself, you prevent assistants from learning to make their own decisions. Sooner or later the capable ones will quit, and the others will sit back and let you do all the work. Ultimately, you will have no time for the thinking and the planning that are the most important parts of your job. Think of your assistants as working with you, not for you.

## Show Faith in Your Employees

Employees tend to perform according to what is expected of them. If they know you have the confidence in them to expect a first-rate job, that's what they will usually try to give you.

## Keep Your Employees Informed

Bring your employees up-to-date constantly on new developments, and let them know well in advance whenever changes are in the offing. As members of a team, they are entitled to know what is going on. If they do, their thinking will be geared more closely to reality, and their attitudes will be more flexible. Give them enough information about conditions and events in your company and industry to let them see themselves and their work in perspective.

Many plans can't be discussed very far in advance. They should, however, be discussed with employees before they are in final form. Doing this will give them that all-important chance to participate. Furthermore, because they will have taken part in shaping the plan, it will be as much theirs as yours, and they will feel a personal responsibility for its success. Hence, they will usually carry out the program with vigor and precision.

## Ask Employees For Counsel and Help

Bring them actively into the picture. It will help to give them a feeling of "belonging" and to build their self-confidence. It will often make them anxious to work harder than ever. Just as important, they may well have good ideas which may never be used unless you ask for them.



## Let Workers Know Where They Stand

The day of "treat 'em rough and tell 'em nothing" has passed. A system providing periodic ratings for employees is the first step. However, the full value of such a system is realized only if ratings are discussed with each person individually so that each can bolster weak points, clear up misunderstandings and recognize his particular talents.

A formal rating system may be worthwhile, but is not necessarily essential if the manager talks at least once a year with each employee about his performance during the past period.

## Give a Courteous Hearing to Ideas

Many ideas may sound ridiculous to you, but you should not act scornful or impatient. There's no surer way to discourage original thinking by an employee than to disparage or ridicule a suggestion he makes. His next idea might well be the very one you want. Make it easy for that next idea to come to you.

## Participation Builds Cooperation

When your people feel they have had a say in a decision, they are much more likely to go along with it cooperatively. If they agree with the decision, they will look at it as their own and back it to the hilt. If they don't agree, they may still back it more strongly than otherwise because of the fact that their point of view was given full and fair consideration.

## Don't Bury Employee Suggestions

Tell the originator of an idea what action was taken and why. If you do so, he'll study other problems and make suggestions on ways to solve them. If his idea is accepted, he will be encouraged by seeing the results of this thinking put into effect. If his idea is not adopted, he will accept that fact more readily and with fuller understanding if you show him that the reasons for rejection are clear and sound. In addition, knowing exactly why his idea was impractical will help the suggester analyze the next problem more clearly.

## Pass the Credit Down

Taking credit for yourself that really belongs to one of your operating people tends to destroy his initiative and willingness to take responsibility. Giving him fair recognition for what he does has a double benefit; he gets appreciation for doing a good job, and you get the help and support of loyal staff. If you take all the bows when somebody else played the leading role, you can rapidly lose the respect of your people.

## Let People Carry Out Their Own Ideas

Occasionally, equally good suggestions on a particular problem come from two individuals at the same time — one person directly responsible in the situation, the other person essentially detached from it. In such cases, choose the recommendation developed by the person who will ultimately carry it out. He will then have a personal stake in proving that his idea is, in fact, workable. Good administrative practice is, therefore, to keep employees constantly aware of your willingness to have them work out their own solutions to problems in their particular operating areas.

## Criticize or Reprove in Private

This may seem obvious, but managers forget to do it every day in hundreds of organizations. Reprimands in the presence of others cause humiliation and resentment instead of a desire to do better next time. Criticizing an employee when people from his department are present undermines his morale and also his enthusiasm to try to do his best for your company.

## Criticize or Reprove Constructively

First, get all the facts; review them with those concerned and reach an agreement on them. Then be ready to suggest a constructive course of action for the future. When you criticize, concentrate on the method or results, not on personalities. If you can precede the criticism by a bit of honest praise, so much the better. Note, however, that some managers do this so regularly and unimaginatively that the compliments lose their value.

## Praise in Public

Most people thrive on appreciation. Praise before others often has a multiple impact. It tends to raise morale, increase prestige and strengthen self-confidence. These are important factors in the development of capable junior managers. Be sure that those you praise are really the ones who deserve it, and that you don't encourage "credit grabbing."

## Accept Moderate "Gripping" as Healthy

In small doses, griping can serve as a safety valve for your people. If they worked under a perfect manager, they would probably still complain just because he was perfect. Vicious, personal sniping is, of course, another matter; here, you should make every effort to have the cause discovered and rooted out. Remember, too, that without some dissatisfaction, you would have little incentive to do, or get, something better.



This College of Agriculture publication is one in a series on personnel management. Other titles in the series that may be helpful to agribusiness managers are:

CIS 611 Recruiting and Retaining Good Personnel . . . . 10 cents

CIS 612 Management Succession . . . . . 10 cents

CIS 613 Problem Employees . . . . . 5 cents

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