

Outside the BOX: Prioritize human-resource development

by **TOM FIELD**,
director of the
*Engler Agribusiness
Entrepreneurship
Program, University of
Nebraska-Lincoln*



Jim Collins, author of the classic business text *Good to Great* makes the case that business success is founded not on great ideas as much as it is on great people. Collins suggests that the right people in the right positions and in the right culture can create unparalleled

momentum and success. Simultaneously, results of a recent Gallup study determined that only 30% of employees across a wide spectrum of industries and businesses are actually engaged in their jobs.

Imagine a team where only 30% of

the members were committed and enthusiastic about their work and the mission of their organization, and were fulfilled by the opportunity to make a difference. It's a startling and distressing scenario with a nearly assured outcome that the business will underperform and struggle to survive.

Often, those of us in agriculture tend to dismiss human-resource management. We struggle to make the connection with topics such as company culture, employee engagement and creating highly effective professional-development programs. However, agricultural business owners, managers and leaders are likely to find that the process of identifying, training and retaining a skilled workforce may be the most pressing challenge of the next decade.

USDA demographic data on all U.S. agricultural producers demonstrates that 17.6% are younger than 45 years of age and that 42.6% are 60 or older. Nearly one-third of agricultural producers are over the age of 65. These data suggest that attracting people to agricultural industries is a high priority worthy of immediate attention.

Tackling the task

Leaders of beef cattle enterprises can best tackle the task of creating an employment plan by inventorying future workforce requirements based on a thorough listing of the anticipated tasks, assignments, duties and skills required to achieve the desired productivity, size and scale, and outcomes of the business enterprise(s) 5 to 10 years in the future.

**Often, those of us in
agriculture tend to
dismiss human-resource
management.**

This process needs to be based on the strategic direction of the business, potential for expansion and unique skills that will be required down the road to enable the business to capture emerging opportunities and generate wins in the future. Conduct an inventory of the specific talents and skills of each current employee and member of management.

As part of the process, categorize employees on their likelihood of being employees in the future, chart anticipated retirement patterns, evaluate the potential impact of key team members leaving for different opportunities and assess their current performance level in the business. Finally, gauge the capacity

for improvement and professional growth of each team member. Detailed discussions focused on performance, aspirations and training specific to individuals will likely be warranted.

Match the future workforce needs of the business with the abilities of the current workforce. This evaluation will help determine the amount of time, energy and resources that will need to be allocated to human resource development in both the short and intermediate term.

Developing alternatives

Once the gap analysis is complete, alternatives can be developed. Options will include growing the capacity of current employees, promotion of some to areas of new responsibility, creating a recruitment strategy as well as determining the appropriateness of a “grow our own” program that prepares younger family members or young people from the community for future opportunities.

In each case, discussions will involve both family and non-family members who are currently employed by the business. Furthermore, consideration will have to be given to younger family members not yet ready to take on positions, but who may be ready within the designated time frame. Finally, management will have to assess the potential to identify and mentor high school and college age candidates from the local community who could be trained and mentored in preparation for full-time employment in the future.

The key element in the success of these approaches is to begin the process now, to be very thorough and strategic, and to seek outside help from successful business people who have been through a similar situation — lenders, attorneys and other professional advisors.

Finally, it is essential to provide excellent training and professional development opportunities, as well as to intentionally create the culture in which people can thrive. Important steps in creating the desired culture include clear statement of and focus on the mission and values of the business.

Practices and processes that demonstrate the mission focus and core values must be embedded and the leader must “walk the talk” to reinforce the desired culture. The final step is to then assure that the people on the team and those being considered for the team are a great fit with the culture and values of the organization.

“Start the bus” is a chant no team wants to hear. Getting the right people doing the right jobs on your team goes a long way in assuring victory.

Don't Miss Out!

Sign up for the Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA by:

- Signing up at www.angusbeefbulletin.com (look for signup in upper left corner); or
- Emailing bulletinextra@angusbeefbulletin.com with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.



The EXTRA is designed to provide news and information electronically to Angus Beef Bulletin subscribers between published issues.