

Outside the BOX: Ranch staffing

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



Ask cattle producers about their biggest challenges and invariably the issue of finding and retaining excellent employees will enter the discussion. Developing effective employment strategies is the responsibility of management, but attaining business

goals and desired outcomes is a shared mission of both employers and employees.

If both management and staff do not commit to the business goals, then the business shrinks and the opportunities for employment diminish. It is the

intersection of shared accountability where great teams are built.

Teams are at the heart of successful organizations and especially those who are able to sustain high levels of performance. Underpinning the most effective teams is a spirit of deep commitment to personal excellence by each and every member. What defines the ultimate impact of a commitment to personal excellence is whether or not the individuals comprising a team use the energy created by the pursuit of exceptional performance selfishly or in service to others.

What makes great teams?

I recently finished a powerful story about teamwork — *The Hard Hat* by Jon Gordon. The story led me to reflect on the attributes of great teammates across all kinds of situations and circumstances. My assessment of the great teams with whom I have been associated directly or have studied from afar is that they share a set of common philosophical themes and behaviors with those described by Gordon:

1. “Leave it better than you found it” is a philosophy that drives team-oriented behavior. High-performance team members claim ownership and take action to lead and generate outcomes that improve the organization. When ownership drives decision making, then people take the extra steps and take on work that is behind the scenes, often unrecognized and usually unglamorous.
2. An attitude of humility coupled with a hunger for excellence is a force multiplier and allows teams of lesser individual talent to dominate their more talented but arrogant competitors.
3. Holding others accountable is impossible without personal accountability. Great teams are composed of people who hold themselves to high standards of performance and who refuse to play the blame game, to make excuses or to take a shortsighted approach. At the same time they hold each other to high expectations because a high level of trust is in place.
4. Communication, connections and compassion are ever present.
5. The 1% rule is deeply ingrained (work to get 1% better in critical areas each and every day). It is the unrelenting dedication to this principle that moves human beings and teams toward their true potential.
6. They do more than attract talent — they attract the right talent, people who are truly aligned with the core values, mission and culture of the team.
7. Each member of the team

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strives to grow their skills, competitiveness and to serve their teammates in pursuit of a common goal.

8. They never shy from the opportunity to take action in pursuit of creating impactful relationships. More often than not, their behavior originates from a desire to see the team succeed.

Motivating opportunities

Kim McCuiston and Ryan Rhodes, faculty members affiliated with the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management have studied human-resource management on large ranches and conclude that understanding job satisfaction, motivation and performance management are at the core of building effective teams. In their study that involved nearly 200 ranch employees, they found that job satisfaction was highly related to the following.

- Doing challenging and interesting work.
- Having access to appropriate tools and information to do the job.
- Understanding expectations of performance, the ranch vision and the rationale behind management decisions.
- Effective communication that facilitated employee engagement, meaningful feedback and recognition.

Ranch employees surveyed in the study reported that motivating factors fell into two primary categories — compensation (bonuses based on personal or ranch performance, salary increases) and opportunities for professional growth (more responsibility, decision making and opportunities to advance).

McCuiston and Rhodes suggest that bonus plans be developed around a written plan tied to SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound) and coupled with incentives — financial and/or nonfinancial — significant enough to motivate behavior. The authors conclude that effective staff management can be improved by increasing knowledge and comprehension of the organizational mission and the specific job requirements and expectations.

Management should clarify performance assessment by providing

training, regular feedback and structured performance reviews focused on continuous improvement of both the enterprise and the individual person, and to reward performance based on the job description and associated expectations.

At the same time, each staff member has the responsibility to develop his or her own professionalism (regardless of job description or position in the

organizational hierarchy) and to embrace the skills and attitudes that lead to excellence as a team member. Creating a culture of accountability, appreciation and achievement is of critical importance to the sustainability of a ranch business.

Ultimately, the success of an enterprise rests on two fundamental questions that must be answered by each and every member of the ranch team

(both management and staff): What kind of teammate are you, and what steps will you take to earn the confidence and trust of your team?



Editor's Note: Tom Field is director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.