

BUILDING BETTER WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN FARM FAMILY MEMBERS

Professor Ron Hanson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Areas of Disagreement In a Family Farming Operation

1. Decision Making.
 - A. Who has the final say in business decisions?
 - B. Who is "really" the boss of the operation?
 - C. Who is responsible for handling finances/farm records?
2. New Ideas for Change.
3. Money Spending Policies.
4. Time-Off Policies and Vacations.
5. Family and Business Goals - Setting Priorities.
6. Farm Employees.
7. Role of Wife (Wives) in the Farm Business.

Human Relationships Necessary For a Successful Family Farming Operation

1. Motivation to farm by son/daughter.
2. Ability to communicate as a family.
 - A. Mutual respect for each other.
 - B. Willingness to listen.
3. Ability to compromise and work things out together.
4. Opportunity for son/daughter to learn and make mistakes.
5. Keep differences in lifestyles (values) between parents and son/daughter out of the farm business.
6. Remember the other children in the family. Avoid problems of favoritism and jealousy among the children in a family.

Strategies to Help Resolve Farm Family Conflicts

1. Initiate open and honest discussions.
2. Keep all discussions on an objective and positive basis.
3. Try to identify the real problem cause. "What is it that is really bothering someone?"
4. Be assertive but not aggressive when sharing your views or feelings. State your position without threatening or attacking the opinions of others.
5. Make sure others understand that even though you might disagree, you still love and/or respect them at all times.
6. Avoid "insurmountable/no win" situations between family members.
7. Build a feeling of trust between all family members.
8. Remember it takes (1) Patience, (2) Persistence, (3) Understanding, (4) Courage, (5) Personal Strength and (6) Forgiveness. It takes a lot of effort by all family members for a farm business to be successful as a family operation.

TEN SKILLS FOR GOOD LISTENING BETWEEN FARM FAMILY MEMBERS

1. Do not pass judgement until you have understood what the other person has said.
2. Do not add viewpoints or change what the other person has said.
3. Do not permit your attention to drift away while the other person is still talking.
4. Do not interrupt or change the subject.
5. Do not close your mind.
6. Do not finish for the other person.
7. Do not permit wishful listening.
8. Do not rehearse your response.
9. Do not put the other person off.
10. Do not rush the other person.

DEVELOPING GOOD LISTENING SKILLS REQUIRES:

1. A commitment of time and attention to the other person.
2. Being sensitive to the feelings of others.
3. Clearly understanding the situation or circumstances involved.
4. Having respect for the opinions of others.

STEPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

1. Identify the central theme or key points of the message being shared.
2. Ask questions to clarify or help sort out the real issues involved.
3. Pay attention to changes in voice tone or pauses.
4. Watch for any nonverbal communication signals.
5. Block out your own biases/prejudices.
6. Don't jump ahead in the conversation.
7. Try to be understanding without being judgmental.
8. Keep a calm and objective attitude.
9. Show that you actually care and really want to help.

WORDS OF ADVICE TO CONSIDER IN BUILDING BETTER WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FARM FAMILY MEMBERS

- 1. Don't rush into any type of family business arrangement.**
- 2. Talk things out ahead of time. Too many decisions are made under time pressure or stress.**
- 3. Talk about the "what if" situations. Analyze all possible alternatives/options.**
- 4. Openly discuss (1) goals (2) personal feelings (3) expectations between all family members.**
- 5. Seek outside help/counseling when or if needed.**
- 6. Recognize there will be "moments" in any family situation. Keep a positive attitude.**
- 7. KEEP COMMUNICATIONS OPEN between ALL family members.**

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING FARM FAMILY BUSINESS MEETINGS

- 1. Set dates so that business meetings are held on a regular basis throughout the entire year.**
- 2. Meeting site should be on neutral territory.**
- 3. Establish an agenda for each meeting so that the meeting itself has a direction and purpose to achieve.**
- 4. Establish any necessary ground rules to be followed during the meeting.**
- 5. Conduct each meeting on a business-like basis. Develop an attitude of professionalism.**
- 6. Keep minutes of any major decisions discussed.**
- 7. Remember that holding family farm business meetings on a regular basis (1) improves family communications, (2) reinforces the feeling that the family farm is a team effort among all family members, (3) eliminates any surprises among family members, and (4) helps to keep the "personal or family biases" out of the farm business operation.**