

Adverse outcomes like those in the last three cases may be toughest to take because the risk of their occurring is most subject to an employer's control. Growers' decisions have considerable influence on the abilities, motivation, and the performance of their employees. Not much can be done about the aggregate number of people looking for farm jobs at a given time in a region, but managers definitely can do a lot to attract, retain, and elicit good work from those around them. Farmers, ranchers, contractors, and other agricultural personnel managers have to think well beyond compliance if they plan to reduce their labor risks, control their costs, and build high performance into their businesses.

Essentials for the Manager

Farm and ranch decisions about enterprise selection, cultivation, animal care, and marketing, for example, require knowledge and ability in three realms: (1) external factors—constraints and opportunities imposed from the outside, (2) techniques—feasible methods for doing things, and (3) nature of the manager and the managed—how an operator and the organisms to be influenced are wired or how they tend to respond to various stimuli. Managing agricultural labor depends on this same triad of “intelligences.” Whether training a vine or an irrigator or trying to cope with a whitefly or a whiner, all three areas come into play.

Understanding external forces and rules (e.g., laws, labor market conditions, and advocacy groups) can be dubbed “environmental intelligence.” Command of techniques for organizing information to support principled decisions (e.g., creating and using budgets, job descriptions, recruitment ads, hiring interviews, wage structures, and appraisal systems) is “technical intelligence.” And awareness of personal needs, values, learning processes, and behavior is “emotional intelligence.”

As labor managers, farm and ranch operators often gear their attention most to the environmental and least to the emotional, perhaps because labor laws and regulations are easier to know than those of human behavior. Yet management guru Daniel Goleman, who popularized the “EI” shorthand for emotional intelligence, argues persuasively that the ways managers handle themselves and their personal relationships (their EI) matter more than conventional IQ or technical skill in determining leadership effectiveness. Great leaders excel not just through determination, industry savvy, and smarts, he says, but by using emotional intelligence competencies like empathy and self-awareness to diagnose situations and vary management styles to fit.

Another theorist, Richard Daft, observes that effective organizations depend on a balanced interplay of “strong forces”—financial results, formal procedures and controls, power, and lines of authority—with “subtle forces”—interpersonal

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communications, vision, trust, and emotions. And since managers in our culture tend to be better acquainted with and over-rely on the strong forces, it is necessary to spend more energy on the subtle.

Although this book aims to support professional development along all three lines, it has an undercurrent of emphasis on EI. By no means does it neglect such important farm realities as organization charts, minimum wage and unlawful discrimination laws, safety rules, and disciplinary action. But the authors believe that even discussion of these topics can be accompanied by consideration of individual motivation, social exchange, perceptual bias, trust, emotional triggers, conflict management, negotiated problem-solving, cultural values and perspectives, and their neighbors in the EI world.



Setting aside as little as one hour per week for reading periodicals, books, and online sources can lead to acquisition of numerous useful ideas over the course of a year.

Getting up and Keeping up as a Manager of People

Agricultural personnel management is part of a large, dynamic professional field. The people who practice it have to understand human behavior, organizations, laws, labor markets, technologies, and the whole of their business situations. They need information beyond what they can acquire through firsthand experience. Most, however, face the dilemma of being strapped for time by an abundance of day-to-day problems with which they could, ironically, cope better if they were more knowledgeable. Few can devote large blocks of time to either formal or self-directed study, and even those who do find that too much knowledge loses currency as the world moves along.

People who want to continue their development as agricultural labor managers can tap a wealth of resources. The references suggested in this book and its companion website include (1) magazines, newsletters, and journals with substantial, regular coverage of personnel management topics, some of them produced by professional associations; (2) government fact sheets and guidance primarily on regulatory topics; (3) classic and contemporary books on