



FG | **INSIGHT**

INTELLIGENCE GUIDE: PEOPLE MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP



YOUR GUIDE TO

Successfully managing and making the most of people in your farm business and how you can work together to achieve goals

INTRODUCTION

Managing people and leading teams can be challenging, especially in agriculture where the pressure to get things done can be huge.

Get it right and the whole team works together, making for a great performance, even under duress, but get it wrong and it can add unnecessary stress to everyone's jobs.

This guide aims to provide some pointers to how you can best manage and lead your team. We have pulled together some key tips, as well as looking at some of the theories

involved and look at how you can apply them to your business.

You'll find some useful checklists, an on-farm case study and links for further investigation.



EMMA PENNY

EDITOR

CONTENTS

4 Managing people

13 Learning from other
industries

17 Leading your team

21 A personal checklist

24 Case study

28 More information

MANAGING PEOPLE



People are the best asset a business has, but are not always given the attention they deserve or need from managers. In the ‘head-down-and-get-on-with-it’ world of farming, notions of people management are not always foremost in the mind of the person running the farm.

But no matter how good the farm set-up is, without the right staff in place, the business potential will never be realised.

Jane Jenkins, head of human resources at [Promar](#), says good staff management can add a huge amount to a business, but is not always top of the list for busy bosses.

ASSETS

She says: “People are your best asset. You can be cash-rich, have as many cows as you like and have a top of the range milking parlour, but without the right people in place, all of these things are irrelevant. People are our most valuable asset.”




Many employers know what they want from their staff in terms of attitude and skill ([see characteristics on the following page](#)), but are unclear about how to get the best from their staff.

Ms Jenkins says a fundamental understanding of what motivates individual staff members is crucial for their own progression and for yours as a boss.

Here we look at how some of the main themes can be applied at farm level.

CHARACTERISTICS EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR IN STAFF

- INITIATIVE
- COMMITMENT
- RESPECT FOR COMPANY
- TENACITY
- DEPENDABILITY
- RELIABILITY
- TECHNICALLY COMPETENT
- SEEING THE BIG PICTURE
- FLEXIBILITY



**YOUR
BEHAVIOUR
HAS AN
INFLUENCE ON
OTHERS, WHETHER YOU
WANT IT TO OR NOT**

Jane Jenkins

The attitude and approach of a boss sets an example for all those around them.

Ms Jenkins says: “Your behaviour has an influence on others, whether you want it to or not.”

Stumbling blocks appear, however, when the boss or head of the farm feels they have been clear about what they expect from staff, but the tasks are not performed or goals remain missed.

“Some staff understand what they need to achieve and motivate themselves to improve – others do not. But do you, as a boss, know your team’s motivations and what they want to achieve?”

Knowing what motivates staff is not as straightforward as it may seem. While many bosses are comfortable with the day-to-day

grind and know how to get their staff to perform basic tasks, the challenge comes when you want them to go above and beyond for the farm.

Many managers think by giving staff more cash they will get a long-term boost in performance. But while extra salary often provides a short-term boost, it is often not long before the staff member goes back to potential under-performance or demotivation, she says.

The challenge is to understand what other incentives can be offered and what will make the biggest difference for the individual.

It might be staff members want more time off in reward for their additional efforts, especially if they are on a comfortable wage.

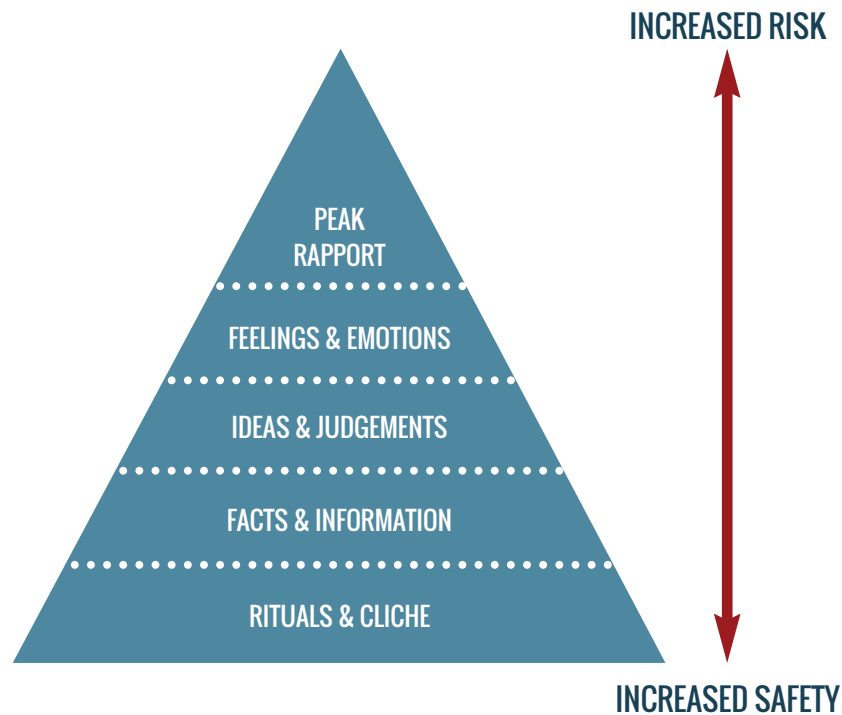
The key thing is to find out what they want, but the risk for a boss can seem greater during the process of unearthing these drivers. Ultimately, a central tenet of performance is ability coupled with desire. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Effective communication is vital for any boss to get the most from their staff.

In farming, it is often the case we take the blunt approach and tell it how we see it, but there are other ways.

Ms Jenkins flags up the communications triangle ([see following page](#)) to illustrate the different levels on which we communicate.

COMMUNICATIONS TRIANGLE



By staying in the bottom two layers, we are not necessarily allowing them or the team to flourish, Ms Jenkins says. Ideas and judgements are about engaging with staff and getting their thoughts on different strategies or tasks which need carrying out.

The buy-in from staff can be huge if they feel they have had a hand in shaping new processes, but the risk and feeling of unease is potentially greater for the boss because they may not be used to opening up the process. Make sure you listen and confirm you have heard what they have said. Non-verbal communication is crucial. If you are an intimidating presence and sit there in a discussion with arms folded and a furrowed brow, the staff member may feel they are not being listened to or appreciated.

FEEDBACK: WHAT MAKES IT EFFECTIVE?

GOOD FEEDBACK IS:

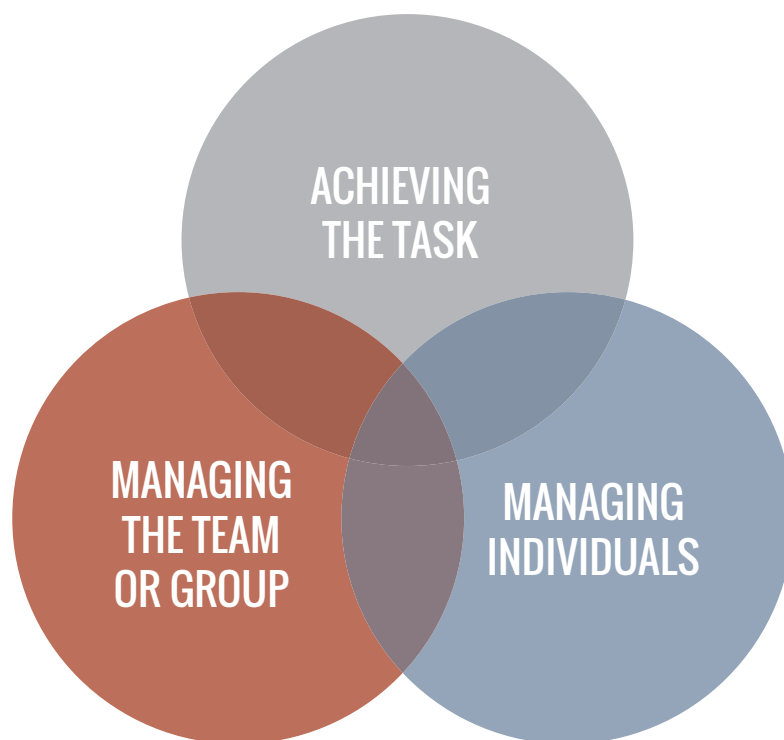
- Specific, not general
- Descriptive, not evaluative
- Focuses on behaviour and events, not the character or the person
- Timely
- Not necessarily formal
- Avoids shocks or surprises
- Gives the intention of allowing the person to change, develop or grow professionally

A GOOD THING TO REMEMBER IS THE 'A.I.D.' APPROACH:

- **Action** – what did you observe?
- **Impact** – what was the effect of the action?
- **Do** – what should be done differently?

PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP: ADAIR'S THREE-CIRCLE DIAGRAM

Academic and leadership theorist John Adair has developed an action-centred leadership model which is represented by Adair's three-circle diagram, illustrating core management responsibilities:



Ms Jenkins says bosses often focus on one or two of these elements, but struggle to achieve the ultimate aim of dealing with all three.

So while a boss might be good telling their team what they want or focusing on individual management issues, they often ignore the wider cohesiveness of the team. Bringing all three together and achieving a rounded approach is the ultimate aim, she says.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

- CREATING A CLIMATE FOR SUCCESS
- CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO
- OFFERING A VISION
- DOING THE RIGHT THING
- GETTING BUY-IN
- MAKING THE COMPLEX SINGLE
- DO YOU CAST A LONG SHADOW AS A LEADER, AND WHAT IS YOUR SHADOW?

LEARNING FROM OTHER INDUSTRIES



Leadership in the [Armed Forces](#) can mean the difference between life and death. It means having the right character to get people on your side and ensuring they will be prepared to put their lives at risk for their leaders.

He may be speaking from a military perspective, but Colonel Andy McCombe highlights key leadership principles which can be applied to other industries. Colonel McCombe joined the RAF as a soldier at the height of the Cold War and there was no fighting. He says:

“Now, it’s different – soldiers joining are on the front line.”

As a result, the Forces are now looking for people with ‘effective intelligence’. “You might have a brain the size of a planet, but if you can’t use it effectively you will be no use. Brightness will not instantly mean you are a good leader.”

Colonel McCombe says the way the Forces operates has also changed enormously, reinforcing the need for good leaders at all levels. “Commanders now let people get on with things, rather than the old style of always checking what was happening.”

This has become increasingly vital as soldiers are being deployed in conflicts such as Afghanistan, where they are often in the middle of nowhere and could not phone to check things.

He says the military has a rigid approach to promoting people – they either improved or they left. Assessment for promotion is based on a set of core skills, with leadership and management as

separate areas. Management capability means planning, allocating and designating priorities effectively, allocating resources, delegating, setting targets and managing change, as well as building an effective team.

He says: “Leadership means projecting personality and character to motivate subordinates to do what is required, promoting a positive sense of purpose and direction, inspiring, influencing, instilling self-esteem in others and creating momentum and success.”

CAPABILITIES

Assessing leadership capabilities is very subjective, he says. “There is no clear yardstick, but a key is to have credibility with people you work with. Without this you will not progress.”

The dictionary definition of credibility is ‘being trusted or believed in’. This can often be judged by people before they meet someone on the basis of what they had heard or found out, he says.

Running an effective team means looking at tasks in a functional way to ensure they are completed. “The military teaches people to look at the needs of a team, the task and the individuals involved. All of these overlap, and if, for instance, one member of the team is injured, the team could collapse or might not cope. Everything in life means looking at all three areas.”

BUILDING CREDIBILITY

COLONEL McCOMBE'S TIPS ON BUILDING YOUR CREDIBILITY:

- Have a vision – tell people your vision and where you want to go
- Walk the walk and be involved – “I hate running and the military does a lot of it. I had to take the squadron running and they expect you to be at the front. I did it, but I struggled”
- Instill a sense of purpose – is your family farm drifting apart? Have a sense of purpose about what you are aiming for
- Use ‘stepping stones’ – break the big vision into stepping stones so you do not disenfranchise people

LEADING YOUR TEAM





**WE BELIEVE A
FUNDAMENTAL
PART OF BEING
A LEADER IS
MANAGING YOUR OWN
BEHAVIOUR**



Neil Adams

Improving leadership skills centres around evaluating your own strengths and weaknesses and challenging yourself about the way you do things and why. Leadership training has been the norm in many bluechip companies for years, but until recently it has not been widely available in farming circles.

However, research into what makes a successful farmer, carried out by [Promar International](#) in conjunction with [Reading University](#), shows thinking about your leadership and management skills can significantly influence your bottom line.

The research, the first of its kind in the UK, selected 100 farms of varying performance and size from Promar's Farm Business Accounts. Each farm was sent a detailed questionnaire to complete about its behaviour and attitudes.

Questions revolved around leadership qualities and areas such as

management style, staff, goals and objectives.

The results helped build up a profile of qualities which seemed to lead to financial success:

→ For example, the survey found farmers who said appearing successful was important to them made on average £15,000 a year more than those for whom it was less important.

→ Farmers whose farm was geared towards maximising profit made an average of £26,000 more, indicating farmers who were constantly thinking about making money were actually making more money.

→ Similarly, farmers who said they believed management was a skill which could be honed and improved were financially better off.

→ On the flip side, farmers who said they spent a relatively high proportion of their time doing ‘office work’ were making an average of £15,000 less than those who did not.

Promar principal consultant Neil Adams says: “Sitting in the office doing paperwork is often just admin work and as a leader of a business this may not be the best use of your time.

“You will make more money by getting an extra litre out of every cow and this is about being on-farm and asking how things could be run better, monitoring staff, checking grass, etc.”

Farmers who believe poor results were out of their control for whatever reason were also not as profitable as were those who were focused on increasing turnover.

BE MINDFUL OF STRESS

There are serious health implications of living with long-term stress, Mr Adams says. “Farmers work in an industry which is unbelievably stressful, where you have to often cope with factors beyond your control, such as the weather, sick animals, Defra, etc. Generally, you do not have a lot of people around for support and the pressure is immense.

“On most of the days when we are bad managers, it is down to stress.”

Mr Adams says it is important to ask how you could manage stress better. “We believe a fundamental part of being a leader is managing your own behaviour.”

HOLIDAYS

He says one of the best things farmers can do to help alleviate stress levels is to get away, so take days off and holidays in order to gain perspective. Often, he says, farmers are working so hard they are unable to see the big picture.

Mr Adams says: “It is the cultural norm in farming to work long hours with little time off, but you can pay a big price in your own health.”

A PERSONAL CHECKLIST



Good communication is key to making people in any business feel valued and motivated. Those working in farm business are no different, say [AHDB](#) and [DairyCo](#) extension officers Izak van Heerden and Heather Wildman.

Staff who feel ‘connected’ to a business will help it flourish by giving a little extra. Without a doubt, a highly motivated team adds value, but it can be hard to be inspired when the winter routine kicks-in. So how can a business keep its people going through all seasons and a heavy workload? Here are five reasons time and energy given to communication is usually well worth it:

1. CASH IS RARELY KING

Perhaps surprisingly, money is not the answer. “Good pay is important, but staff morale is rarely dictated by the pay cheque,” says Mr van Heerden. “Once a fair level of pay is in place, money stops being a significant long-term motivator.”

2. INVEST IN THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Using some of the farm’s profit to invest in new kit (such as a new scraper), repair old kit (a scraper tractor), or simply fix small, yet important, details is always appreciated. Working latches on gates, for instance, make daily life easier and more efficient for staff working on-farm.

3. GET PEOPLE ON-SIDE

Mr van Heerden says a sustainable and effective motivator is to get employees to ‘buy-in’ to goals: “Value opinions and keep things simple. Have regular meetings or informal discussions which allow your team to air their views over a chat, rather than grabbing time from the often stressed daily running of the farm.”

Mrs Wildman says: “Whether it is a case of achieving the best on a daily basis or implementing a five-year plan to expand the herd, communication is the key to motivation.”

4. SHARE YOUR VISION

Mrs Wildman says: “It can be really hard to get a farm owner to set out and share his vision for the farm. Yet you have to be able to encourage staff to get behind your ideas and work out – and agree – the business goals. You can’t force people to move from A to B; as successful change can only be achieved by setting out a shared vision which all members of a team feel they can get behind and do their bit to help try and achieve.”

5. DO SOME TRAINING

Why not make it your aim to engage in some sort of formal training around staff management or aspects of communication?

CASE STUDY: MANAGEMENT ON-FARM



Integrated training for all farm staff has helped Whitley Manor Farm, a family-run mixed enterprise in Shropshire, embrace new technology and innovation to achieve much greater levels of efficiency.

Implementing new technology on-farm can be costly, time-consuming and above all requires total ‘buy-in’ from staff if it is to be successful.

It soon became apparent to Harry Heath, manager at Whitley Manor Farm, that in addition to project management, he would benefit from a much broader staff management training programme. This could ensure the farm realised the full potential of two key investments – the people working for the business and a new farm operating system.



HARRY HEATH

OPPORTUNITY

Having developed his own ‘soft skills’, he set-up an appraisal procedure on-farm which would give staff the opportunity to talk about their issues or concerns and identify key areas for their own development. Staff were also included in the development of new systems and consulted on other changes around the farm.

Mr Heath says: “The process enabled me to be more targeted in terms of training we send our people on, so it is relevant and of interest to them, yet also complementary to our business aim of becoming one of the top performing units in the country.”

DEVELOPMENT

Staff were enrolled on the Pig Industry’s Professional Register, so they could track their own development and skills activities.

“Technical training, vet meetings and attending local discussion groups have helped our people increase their technical knowledge and, by being given more ownership of tasks, their levels of confidence have improved so they all now contribute to the ongoing development of the business.”

This has resulted in farm staff developing their own standard operating procedures, where everybody has clear expectations relating to each task.

INVESTING

Training is offered at all levels of the business, from the apprentice through to the owner or manager.

Mr Heath believes by investing in training for himself and his staff, he has driven the business forward in what has been a difficult couple of years due to all the changes being implemented on-farm.

He says: “It is not easy to pinpoint exactly where the business has benefited as a direct result of training, but I would definitely say the farm is achieving much improved levels of production efficiency, staff are happy and more confident in their roles, and significant financial savings have accrued from reducing the amount of consumables and feed.

“There is also more understanding of change and how best to implement it; staff workload is managed more effectively, resulting in a better work and life balance; while more recording and analysis of cost and time has brought about an improved general efficiency on-farm.

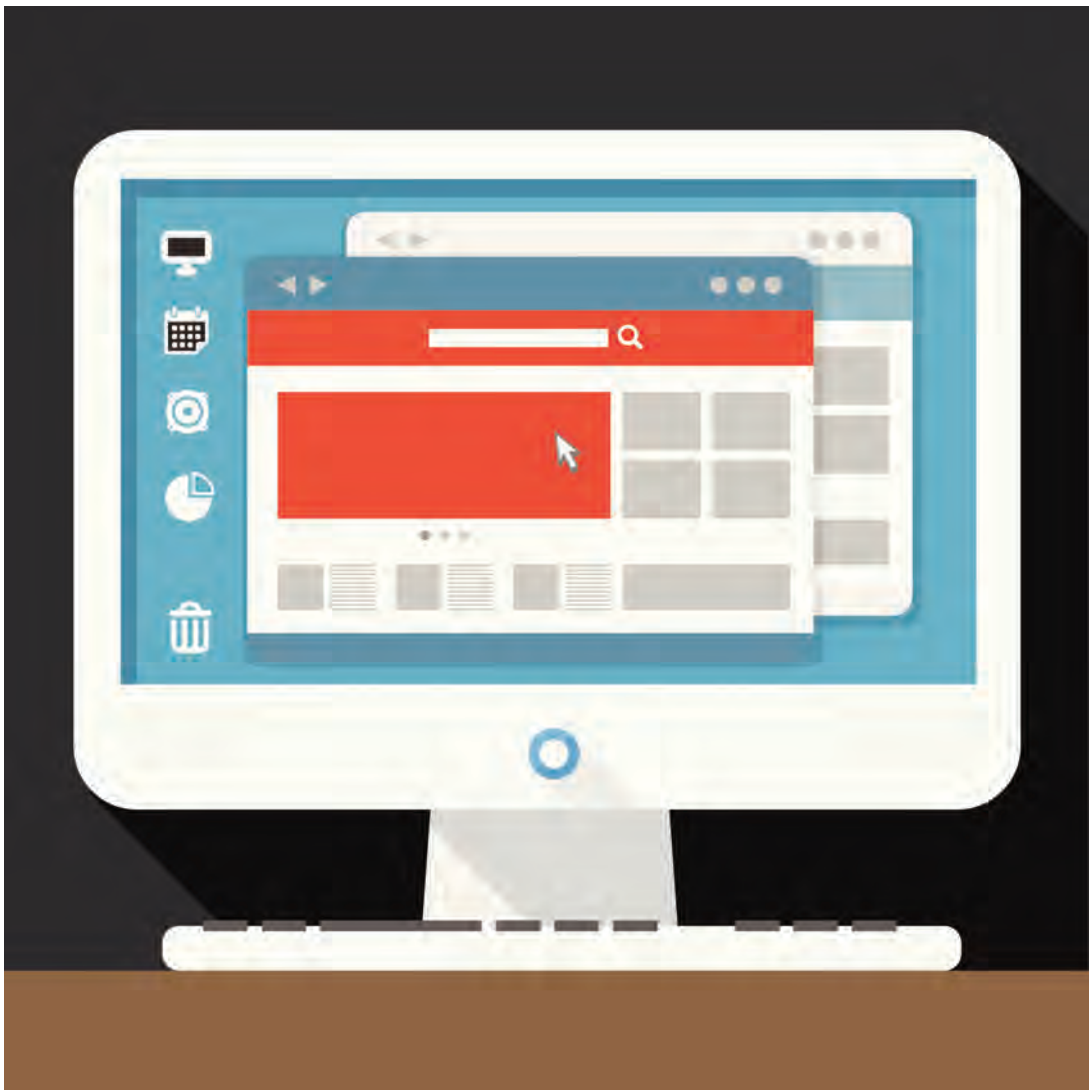
EXTERNAL FACTORS

“Quantifying all the changes is impossible, especially when the market is influenced by so many external factors, but overall I would say without training the business would not be where it is now and we would not be on track to realise our ambition to become a top performer.”

FARM FACTS

- Breeder/finisher pig unit with 560 sows
- Sells 250 bacon pigs per week
- Manages 202 hectares (500 acres) wheat, barley and oilseed rape
- Cereals milled on-site

MORE INFORMATION



THERE ARE PLENTY OF SITES OFFERING FURTHER READING

[Business Balls](#) is a free website with useful hints and tips on all business matters, including managing people

[Mind Tools](#) offers information on improving your approach to management and leadership

[The Human Factor](#) is a thought-provoking (but academic) article on managing people

[The Institute of Leadership and Management](#) provides a useful article on leadership and authenticity in the workplace

[Which type of boss are you?](#) is a fun page from the Institute of Leadership and Management

[There are some good video talks online, mostly from TED](#)