

Building Your Bench — A Simple Self-Analysis

Coming into March Madness season means commentaries everywhere are filled with coaching references. So, Coach, what does the bench look like right now? For those of us raising Herefords, we might be thinking of “our bench” as the group of heifers in the barn gearing up for the Junior National Hereford Expo or maybe the replacement pen we’re planning to get bred this spring. But, let’s talk about a different animal — the people side of our businesses.

Let’s start with your current bench, as it relates to three categories:

- Age
- Experience
- Expertise

Once you’ve looked at your current bench, it’s time to consider the pipeline you need. Take a look at the checklist below and assess your current talent pool and the decisions you have yet to make.

Roles at the farm and ranch now are different, and the change going forward will blow our minds. There are jobs that don’t even exist yet which will be integral aspects of future farm management! With that in mind, think of ways to limit developing young leaders for functions that may soon be unnecessary. While you can’t avoid essential training to operate the machinery of today or working with the herd you currently

have, you also need to look ahead and to find ways to prepare your successors for the future. This is where real coaching lies.

Role is different from job description

Simply put, the terms “job description” and “role” are not the same thing, though they are often used interchangeably.

A role is the *overall function* that a person plays in the business. It may or may not have a descriptive title.

A job description is the *list of general and specific activities and responsibilities* the person in the role must perform.

While you know how to do your job and what your role is, can you effectively transition it to someone else? I find that the most infrequently used job description is the one for the top leader at the farm. That needs to change as you transition leadership. Have your description ready and clear. Here are some questions to help:

- What functions will be needed to run the business going forward?
- What areas of the business are changing — either growing or decreasing?
- Are we prepared to meet those changing needs in terms of onboarding new personnel or in terms of time available for current personnel?

- What roles today are filled by people who may be transitioning out of the business in five years or less?

Sometimes, it is easier to think about roles in terms of what you need but don’t presently have:

- What expertise is missing from the business, even if I don’t need it today?
- How will I meet this need? Is it with training or new hires?
- In what ways are we “just getting by?” Are we utilizing people or putting people in positions where they are “just okay?”
- Do we have roles now that we don’t need or should phase out?

As a keynote speaker, I am frequently approached at conferences by young leaders sharing some of their transition frustrations. One concern I often hear is that they know generally *what* they are supposed to do at work, but it is hard to see where one job starts and another stops. They are (painfully) aware this overlap creates conflict — much of it has to do with others in the operation becoming territorial. Individual responsibilities need to be identified, also known as role clarity. Role clarity should not be reserved for the elite at the top. People naturally function better when boundaries are clear.

The younger generation needs to be consulted not just about roles they see as emerging but also about the training and education they believe is needed. Yes, ask *them*. Do your future a favor and seek input from those who will be doing the work of tomorrow. **HW**

Sarah Beth Aubrey is an entrepreneur and founder of Aubrey Coaching and Training. She can be reached at sarah@sarahbethaubrey.com.

Talent pipeline risk-assessment checklist

- ✓ I have identified the critical roles for the next 12 to 24 months.
- ✓ I am aware of emerging roles in the next 24 to 48 months.
- ✓ For emerging roles, I have examined my existing crew for potential growth and development.
- ✓ I have a process to manage performance and career paths for key employees.
- ✓ I have identified successors for key employees and leaders.
- ✓ I have evaluated flight risk and retention strategies to keep key personnel. **HW**