

How to Define Leadership

Shape leaders on your operation by listening to feedback.

Legendary coach Vince Lombardi said, "Leaders are made, they are not born."

Yet, if leaders are made, they are shaped by their experiences, education, mentors and more. When we talk about defining leadership, it looks different from one leader to the next. Yet, there are three common facets of leadership that pertain to us in agriculture: self-leadership, operational leadership and industry leadership.

- **Self-leadership** relates to self-governance and self-awareness.
- **Operational leadership** is about understanding how to run the business and place the right people in the right role.
- **Industry leadership** is about the obligation to lead by playing a part in innovation, creating dialogue with consumers and cultivating sustainability.

Grow as a leader

Where do you thrive as a leader? Does it come naturally to lead the charge in your operation? Do you prefer to quietly lead by being in service to your

employees and customers? Are you the type of leader that is known in your community as a leader beyond the farm?

Take some time to reflect on these three types of leadership (self, operational and industry) — where you are as a leader today, and where you want to go.

- Do you want to reorganize how leadership looks in your operation? By beginning with self-leadership, you start at the top.
- Do you need to revisit your management structure within your operation? Operational leadership may be where you need to focus on next.
- Perhaps, you want to shore up your industry leadership by joining or becoming more involved in trade associations, advisory boards or boards of directors.

Listening to feedback

If leaders are made, then one way they grow is through attention to feedback. Giving feedback is often easy for us in agriculture but receiving it can be a different story. Yet, to grow as a leader you

need to listen. One way to receive some feedback is by using assessments.

How would it change your operation if individuals had a job that focused on their strengths and let them thrive instead of saddling them with tasks they can't and won't ever accomplish?

While it is true that there are some tasks that require everyone to pitch in, everyone is different. There are people in your operation who are task managers, people managers and self-guided employees. There are people who love to learn, love to dream up new ideas or love to be the expert and really excel at one thing. Using a simple assessment tool may help you to identify these and more objectively move employees around, even family members.

Assessment tools abound. CliftonStrengths offers several assessments including many based upon the book "Strength Finders 2.0" by Tom Rath, which can be purchased for \$20. You can also receive customized assessments from independent consultants, which provide a comprehensive view of a leader's strengths and opportunities for growth.

Start searching and find something that fits your budget and time constraints. Assessments should be in a common language that helps individuals take a look at where they are, what their unique skills and talents are and how they can develop over time.

Knowing where your team is strongest allows you to bring in employees in other areas to help your operation succeed in ways you never thought possible, simply by finding where you're already set up to succeed and capitalizing on it.

Relax and be open-minded when reviewing the feedback. Some of it may not be positive. Take some time to sort through the information to look for patterns. It's important to decide what you want to do with the feedback. You don't have to listen to all of it, but you should consider the value of this kind of feedback and how it can make you a better professional. **HW**

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