

Five Steps for Families

Family operations should take steps to develop and coach the next generation of leaders.

Last month we discussed developing leadership, and I shared some stories from the amazing women I met at the Top Producer Summit in Nashville, Tenn. As I reflect on that event, there is one theme that keeps coming back to my mind — family.

While all six of the women had different jobs, backgrounds and hailed from different parts of the country, they all had one thing in common — family. They were managing successful businesses and their families. Many also worked side-by-side with their family on a daily basis.

How do you balance family and work when you work with your family? Is there a perfect formula to achieving this?

Perhaps the “Five Steps to Develop the Next Generation” applies to families too.

Bringing family into the fold

Going back to Susan Weaver Ford's remarks during the Executive Women in Agriculture (EWA) panel, she says, “I was never forced into farming. I just loved it from a young age, and I saw it as quality time spent with my dad, so it was easy for me. Now that I have my own kids, I never want to make them do anything they don't want to do. I can already see the passion they have for farming at young ages, so again, it's really easy.”

As we see leadership and management transition to younger generations, pure passion for farming helps mold quality leaders. The eagerness to get out in the field or submerge oneself into new technology makes those five steps to coach and develop your next generation a breeze, and it may look a little different when it comes to working with family.

Indiana farm girl turned lawyer Polly Dobbs served on the second panel of women. While still practicing agricultural law, Dobbs and her family decided to move back to the farm. In juggling these responsibilities, she says, “It's important to set boundaries, pick one job at a time and do it really well.”

While passion for farming can create your next generation of leaders, boundaries are extremely important when those future leaders are your children and close family. Dobbs shared a story about her daughter exhibiting interest

in showing livestock. Thrilled to hear her daughter wanted to show cattle, Dobbs wondered how she would juggle her heavy workload on top of teaching her daughter the ins and outs of the showing. Starting with boundaries, she decided they weren't going all-in from the get-go. “Let's start small, and if we can do this one thing really well, we can move up from there,” she says.

Hearing how Dobbs' daughter focused on one thing and achieved her goal translates to preparing your future leaders at the farm. When it comes to family, boundaries are important. Setting those are incredibly different, but as you've heard me say in this column before, when young leaders return to the farm, it is the perfect time to implement boundaries. Along with boundary setting, start small and give the young leader one essential role. This responsibility — and all that comes with it — helps develop that future leader's work style, attitude and drive. It is like a tryout, if you will.

Creating culture for the future

Thinking about the five steps to develop and coach your next generation, *when it's your family, it's always easier said than done*. Once you have your boundaries set, make the effort to learn how to stick with them. You're not just passing down a farm legacy; you're molding your culture and expectations to be passed down for generations. As you mold this culture, your future leaders know they have a strong foundation to lean on; you become their influence. Before your eyes, you see your new leader being accountable not only for themselves but also for the next generation. **HW**

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

Five Steps to Develop the Next Generation

Step 1: Start with why.

Be clear about your “why.” Then, it's much easier to outline a vision and strategy that includes a set of goals for this process.

Step 2: Take inventory.

Create your human asset state-of-the-state. How can employees become better prepared to lead? How much time is spent identifying critical topics for knowledge transfer and taking action?

Step 3: Cultivate culture.

The idea of coaching — beyond the sports field — is fairly unfamiliar to most people in agriculture. But it can't be the case any longer.

Step 4: Build influence.

The overall theme is about building a powerhouse professional network. Consider training, education, peer groups and advisory boards, to gain experience, and develop advocacy and communications skills.

Step 5: Develop accountability.

No successful process is ever complete without implementation, and remember it's a joint effort. Build accountability systems (like performance metrics and personnel reviews). **HW**