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Learn to Delegate

I often work alone and this week's article hits a nerve close to home for me, but it is a good one for all "people managers" to consider. One of the most difficult things to keep in mind in any agricultural operation is that hard work alone will not always make the business a success. Strong managers often lead to a successful business. Troy Marshall, contributing editor to Beef Magazine, makes some good points that farm managers need to consider at times.

Intuitively, most managers know they spend far too little time working on bigger position issues such as strategic planning and marketing. The easiest thing to do is continue to work in the business instead of working on the business. J.C. Penney summed it up very well -- "The single greatest cause for failure in managers is their inability to delegate."

Delegation for most goes against the work ethic that's so much a part of agriculture. Managers feel guilty having employees or family working on a project while they themselves are inside at their desk. Perhaps the hardest thing to do is to stop doing things ourselves and start leading others to do them.

This struggle with delegation has three roots:

- One is ego -- "I'm not sure they will do it as well as I would." Accept the fact that, at least initially, it may take more time to teach others than it does to do it yourself.
- The second is guilt -- "I want to be a team player." Often, the jobs that need to be delegated first are the less glamorous jobs in an operation. You'll be shifting your efforts from the jobs that return \$5/hour to the jobs that pay \$100/hour or more.
- The third obstacle is fear -- "I know I'm qualified to sort cows etc... I'm not so sure I am qualified to develop and implement a marketing program." Fear keeps us from doing the really important things by helping us rationalize that the other tasks are more urgent.

Here are some tips for making the commitment to delegate:

- Stop doing the task and select the person you want to handle the project.
- Convey the importance and significance of the task that you're delegating and demonstrate the faith you have in that person. Take the time to show them how to do it.
- Clarify the standards you expect and be available to help them accomplish it.
- Don't baby-sit the project, but be available for feedback and follow-up to make sure that progress is being made.
- Praise, reward and celebrate their success. Don't get caught in the trap of feeling threatened when someone does a delegated task better than you did. After all, that's part of the goal -- to delegate tasks that often aren't your strength.

Start delegating today. Sit down and list your management strengths and weaknesses, the tasks you are accomplishing and those you would like to accomplish. Then, make the decision and commitment that you are going to increase your effectiveness by at least 20% by prioritizing the most important tasks and assigning them to the most qualified person. Realize it's okay to be at your desk at 9 a.m. while others are working outside. It's okay to admit you might not be an expert in range management, herd health, nutrition, genetics, marketing or accounting. More importantly, it isn't a sign of weakness to admit you can't get it all done yourself. Taking control of your destiny is the only thing you can't afford to delegate.