

Marketing

# Summer brings tension

**A**ROUND the middle of the summer, depending on the harvest and the weather, employees and family members in a family farming or ranching business can become a little irritated with one another. Long hours, a fast pace, unpredictable weather, multiple family demands and work priorities are a few of the items that can impact working relationships.

**Show interest in employees**

While there may not be much time to deal with family member or employee frustrations, letting that tension build may eventually spell trouble. Lack of communication usually results in assumptions about behavior, which resurface when the frustration boils over.

For example, an employee that leaves early in the evenings, before you are quite done for the day, may give the impression that he or she isn't a hard worker, thus affecting the employee's harvest bonus.

By conversing with the employee, however, you may learn about family problems and the employee's efforts to improve a relationship with his spouse or kids.

Most farm business owners I know would — if they knew an employee needed to work on his relationship with his family — make some short-term ad-



**Family Business**

By LANCE WOODBURY

justments in their expectations. It is in everyone's interests to see the employee improve the situation. Without discovering the root cause of the behavior, the employer might make a financial decision that makes the employee's home situation even worse.

Communication, even if only a 15-minute, big-picture "check-in" on how employees or family members are doing away from the job, can help prevent future conflict because it provides a context for observing behavior.

I often liken this kind of conversation to the oil that lubricates the engine (the people) of the business. You might go for a short distance without it, but eventually the engine (the relationships) will freeze up!

**How to vent**

Another communication strategy is awareness of everyone's need to vent. We all need someone to whom we can express our frustration. Venting to an employee or family member that works closely with the person you are frus-

trated with may put that person in an awkward position, or at worst may encourage gossip or conflict if they share your comments with others.

Venting to your spouse is often natural, but if all that your spouse hears is the criticism about what others are doing wrong, and he or she doesn't have a good balance or knowledge of all of the things others do right, the spouse may develop a lopsided picture of how things really work.

**New perspectives**

Consider venting to someone who is removed from the business and can offer a balanced perspective, challenging you to consider alternative perspectives. That person should also be a good listener who can keep discussion confidential. More importantly, recognize that you might be able to provide relief to someone else by being the go-to person.

Venting doesn't solve the problems, but offers a chance to let off some steam and reflect on the issues you are dealing with, which may not seem so big if you have some outside perspective.

Woodbury is a mediator, facilitator and family business consultant in the Garden City office of Kennedy and Coe LLC. Family Business is produced by Kennedy and Coe.

## Risk and Profit conference 2005 slated for August

**K**ANSAS State University's annual Risk and Profit conference, Aug. 11-12 at the K-State Alumni Center in Manhattan, will once again feature topical seminars to help farmers, ranchers, lenders and others improve the bottom line.

Themed "Economics Makes You Money," the conference offers producers the chance to interact with like-minded farmers and ranchers, plus K-State Agricultural Economics faculty.

Attendees will have a variety of seminars to attend. Topics include: the next farm bill; white wheat; crop insurance; land prices; employee management; agritourism; the effect of tenderness on cattle value; Canadian beef issues; productivity and farm size; and many more. Also planned are speech by motivational speaker Mark Mayfield, a livestock and crop marketing outlook, and a trade show.

Folks who pre-register can attend for \$160 per person, or \$140 per person if the group numbers four or more. After Aug. 5, the cost rises to \$185.

The registration fee includes four meals, conference proceedings and parking. Hotel reservations are to be made on your own.

For more information, call (785) 532-1204 or (785) 532-5823, or visit [www.agmanager.info](http://www.agmanager.info).



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