

Guiding Principles: Stan Reiss

By [Tanner Ehmke](#)

Having started his career as a physical education teacher, cultivating people has been Stan Reiss's passion even in farming. Today with his wife, Cheri, sons Clint and Brett, and four full-time employees with six seasonal employees, Stan acts as CEO of [Southwest Family Farms](#) in Plains, Kansas, consisting of 17,000 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and milo and 23,000 acres of custom-farmed ground. Stan and his family grew the farm from 1,000 acres after deciding to farm full-time in the late 1990s while managing the family-owned John Deere dealership. Stan points to eight principles that have guided the family operation on a path of success.

Respect others: "It doesn't matter if someone's family, an employee or landowner. With anyone we come in contact with, we have respect for them and we meet their needs and goals as best we can. We're very loyal to our partners and to the people we do business with."

Embrace emotion: "Decision-making isn't always just about facts and figures. Emotion can help us with decisions. The most critical thing in life is how you handle people and how they respond back to you. We try to treat every body as family and how we want to be treated."

See the world: "When you go to college, it gets you away from home to meet different people with different lifestyles. We've been very fortunate with our kids. They've come back and still hold their values high, but they'll always sit and listen to others' values and points of view."

Be a steward: "We really try to take care of all the land, including the rented land. Not just what we own. A lot of land owners do not ever come out here, so we send them an annual calendar that has a few pictures of their farm. They need to see the difference and know how people take care of their land."

Follow through: "Once you tell somebody you're going to do something, you do it. No matter how painful it is. You develop a relationship with people with a history of doing the right thing."

Put it in writing: "Everything's in writing. Everybody has a transition plan. We have a business plan that we go over every year. We have an employee handbook and standard operating procedures. It's our farm bible. Everyone knows what the rules are and what to expect. It gives them the freedom to make choices on their own."

Listen: "There are three sides to every story: Your side, my side, and the truth. I learned at our John Deere Dealership that if you have a customer that's upset, let them talk. Then work with them for a win-win solution."

Put family first: "It's not always about dollars and cents. It's how you help your family and employees better their lives and how much time you spend with your family. There are so many times farming takes priority, so we create a family-type atmosphere where employees know we care about them."

Getting Onboarding Right

By [Davon Cook](#)

So you've made a great hire. Your new worker shows up on time the first day. Now what?

First, make a plan before they show up the first day! The process of integrating a new employee into your organization is called "onboarding." You are intentionally getting them on board to understand your organization, your team, and their role in it. Refer to the [job description](#) you put so much thought into. Make a calendar of the first 4-6 weeks in half-day increments. Which of the responsibilities will they be focused on? Translate that to activities they could be doing each day. Things may change, but having a first draft helps you line up the people and resources they will need to get started.

Second, consider who will need to be involved in their training. Have you taken the time to brief that person on your new hire, the job description, and your hopes and desires for this new recruit? Have you equipped the trainer with the information and helped develop the skills to be effective at teaching? (More on training specifically in a future column.)

Now you are ready. And now it's the first day. When the new staff member arrives, make them feel welcome. Take the time for introductions and a tour, even if you delegate it to a buddy. Be realistic about how much one can



absorb at first. I've heard it said that the first day on a new job is like kindergarten: it's successful if you learn where the bathroom is, where to eat, and the names of a few new friends.

Define your expectations for how and when you or another team member will check in with the new worker. Good communication starts from day one. Show that you are investing in their success by committing to a regular time to answer questions and provide helpful, early feedback. If this is a strategic hire in a new or critical position, perhaps taking them to lunch once a month is a practical way to make sure you are building a communicative relationship.

In our busy daily management lives, it's easy to let the onboarding process be an afterthought. Remember, however, you are setting the tone for what will hopefully be a long, productive employment relationship.

Grow More to Give More

By [Cori Wittman](#)

Having spent the majority of the last six years living in rural Thailand, my Thai neighbors have been some of my greatest educators. I'm now faced with the task of carrying these learning moments into daily life on our Idaho farm.

One such moment happened on a visit to the small farm of one my Thai "uncles." He recently invested in a well that will allow him to raise about a half-acre of vegetables in the dry off-season rather than relying on a single rice crop for subsistence. As I helped him water this newly established vegetable garden, we talked about his goal of putting in a drip irrigation system and plans to slowly grow the vegetable operation. It was at that point that a shy smile lit up his face and he said, "The more I produce, the more I can give!"

Such a simple statement, yet so enlightening. A man who lives simply – a wooden stilt-house with no electricity, a few head of cattle, spending his energy on laborious fieldwork and caring for elderly in-laws – and his whole aim is to **grow more so he can give more**.

What was equally impactful about his statement was what he *didn't* say. He didn't say he wanted to earn more so he could *start* giving. No matter how much or little he has, he's one of the most joyful givers I know. Our small Thai community of ragamuffin kids practically lived off his mango and coconut trees, his "skinny chicken" population and their modest harvest of arguably the best jasmine rice in the world.

He also didn't say that he wanted to earn more so he could buy [insert wish list of "things that would make life easier" here] and *then* maybe start giving. And believe me, there are a number of life-improving investments that you and I would more than likely prioritize if we were in his shoes. Electricity and plumbing, for starters.

I walked away from that conversation challenged on a number of levels. It's easy to give out of our wealth; how many of us are willing to give out of our poverty? Is our goal to earn more so we can *start* giving? Is it to earn more so we can *have* more? Or do we live simply and generously – and joyfully, I might add – and seek to grow more so we can give more?

Faith and Family Business: When "Soft" is as "Hard" as it Gets. (Proverbs 25:15)

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

Last month I looked at Proverbs 25:11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver," and concluded that "apt" or "fit" words can be the difference between success and failure in your relationships and family business. But I left unanswered the question of what "fit" words are, from the perspective of Proverbs.

Today I would like to answer that question by moving down a few verses to Prov. 25:15, "With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones." The key thought is contained in the last few words, where the remarkable idea is expressed that the most powerful persuasive tool in our arsenal is a soft (also translated "gentle" or "tender") tongue.

That such a tongue is rare, even exceptional, can be inferred by how we use language. Note which words we normally use with "tongue." We talk about a "biting" or "acerbic" or "sharp" or "bitter" or "caustic" or "sarcastic" tongue, but rarely is a person commended for a "soft tongue." Yet the Scriptures point to "softness" as fundamental.

So fundamental is it that, paradoxically enough, it can break the hardest thing in the body—a bone. How can words, as it were, break bones? In a word, soft words do this by helping to reframe a conversation. What began as someone's assertive or angry or dominant statement can, when met with gentleness, turn into a new encounter. Gentle words give a person space to reconsider his or her anger or strong speech, and give the conversation room to grow. Try gentle words in your work with your family business. See where it gets you.

