

## Guiding Principles: Lynn Rundle

By [Tanner Ehmke](#)

[Lynn Rundle, CEO of J&J Family of Farms](#), in Loxahatchee, Florida, has a lot on his plate at the farm and multi-generational produce company with 20-25 producers across Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida and Mexico. The company has over 500 employees at the peak of the season including seasonal labor to hand-pick the produce; a 1,200-acre farm growing peppers, cucumbers, squash, and eggplant; and a supply chain that stretches across the U.S. Rundle stresses that having a strong foundation of integrity and work ethic is necessary to hold the vast team together on a guided path forward. Lynn, who grew up on a Kansas dairy farm and was founder and CEO of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grain Processing prior to leading J&J Family of Farms, points to eight guiding principles that define his leadership.

**Have integrity:** “I approach integrity on a faith basis. It’s been part of my life since I was in high school. There’s a lot of publicity about farm labor today. Are people taking care of farm labor? Today we call it social responsibility, but really, it’s just doing the right thing, which starts with having a strong moral compass.”

**Build the right culture:** “I try to build a culture of trust and accountability. You need to trust that your teammates are there for you, and you need to hold people accountable – and that’s for the CEO all the way down to the guy packing the box.”

**Find the right people:** “Find the people that share the same core values and who are willing to hold people accountable. You start out with that and build it in all of your employees.”

**Lead by example:** “You can say that you value integrity, collaboration, teamwork and trust. But you have to *be it*, and *live it*, because that’s ultimately what people are looking for. It’s something that you can’t mandate. Trust is something you have to earn.”

**Plan for growth:** “J&J is growing as we assimilate the best growers in the different growing regions into our family of farms. Today’s produce industry is all about supply chain management. Reducing the time between the field and the shelf is what will ultimately make us successful.”

**Add value:** “In our industry, adding value means more processing and more packaging. Whether you’re slicing or dicing – they don’t want to do it in the grocery store anymore – or enhancing the product through sizing and packaging, we are adding value by making our products more convenient.”

**Be transparent:** “We want to be transparent with our growers, and right now one of the big areas is food safety and helping our growers to be compliant with the new Food Safety Modernization Act. We’re taking an active role in helping our growers get up to speed on food safety and social responsibility.”

**Be consistent:** “Your customer values what you’re doing. You don’t let them down because they’re counting on you. They’ve got a store or a restaurant to run, and they’re counting on you to deliver. That’s our job.”

## Hiring for Potential

By [Davon Cook](#)

In my [previous article](#), I discussed the way competency-based interviews help to assess a candidate’s ability and experience with specific skills. In this article, I invite you to consider a different ability of a prospective worker: their **potential** to learn and grow. While you may be hiring someone for a specific task today, your company and your needs may change significantly over time.

The June 2014 Harvard Business Review article [21st-Century Talent Spotting](#) states, “So the question is not whether your company’s employees and leaders have the right skills; it’s whether they have the **potential** to learn new ones.” It defines **potential** as “the ability to adapt to and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments.” Thus, when you hire in 2016 you are hiring for two things: ability in a task now and potential for doing future tasks.

So how do you assess potential? As in the case of competency-based interviewing, ask for concrete examples that illustrate the potential to grow, using these indicators:



- **Motivation.** Specifically, motivation to achieve unselfish goals. While ambition can be a positive motivator, make sure it's humble ambition that can work toward collective goals, not just for personal glory.
- **Curiosity.** People that are naturally curious are excited to learn and able to embrace stretch assignments that feed that curiosity. A curious person sees a new situation as an opportunity, not a roadblock.
- **Insight.** The ability to make sense of information and experiences by looking beyond the status quo and applying them to new possibilities.
- **Engagement.** The ability to connect with others to achieve and persuade, using a mix of emotion and logic. An engaged person has people skills that both give to and take from others' strengths.
- **Determination.** In defining "potential", the tenacity to take on challenges and weather setbacks is critical to continued growth.

Hiring for potential means being more open-minded to candidates that don't arrive with the exact previous experience you'd prefer. If you learn to identify potential, you may also find that a worker's ultimate value to your organization exceeds the requirements of the original job description. The tractor driver you're hiring today may grow to be operations manager someday. Your scale clerk may learn to be your controller. Finally, don't limit identifying potential only to new hires. Be willing to ask yourself the question, "Who in my current organization may have the potential to expand their role?"

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## Generosity: Can We Afford It?

By [Cori Wittman](#)

With commodity prices hitting five-year lows, many farmers are dusting off budgeting worksheets that have been neglected for years. I'm one of them.

Whether you survived the farm crisis of the 80s or were an oblivious toddler through those years, we've all likely been affected firsthand or heard enough stories to feel like we were. The lesson: stay humble and have a healthy fear of an era of tight margins. For me, an even more important and often overlooked lesson has been the value of staying true to your values even when – especially when – times get tough.

Tax season. Prices below the cost of production. The inability to find a bullish economist no matter how many conferences you attend. Such things scare us into tightening our belts and rethinking every check we write.

So here is where staying true to our values comes into play. Because to be quite frank, the easiest checks to stop writing are the ones that have nothing to do with our business. They're the ones to our churches and non-profits. They're the ones that would help a neighbor in need. And yet, in times like this, I would argue those checks are the most important ones to write.

This may sound like terrible financial advice. But in my experience, *the more difficult it is to be generous, the more valuable your generosity*, both for you and for the beneficiary.

When we become focused on the fear of bleak economic times, our memories tend to become short. We forget the faith that carried us through hard times in the past. We forget the stories of blessing that came when we made hard decisions to be sacrificially generous.

The budget you're looking at this year may not make giving an easy decision. You may think you can't afford to be generous in this environment. I would argue that we can't afford NOT to be.

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## Faith and Family Business: How "fit" Are Your Words? (Proverbs 25:11)

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

One of my favorite styles of painting is still life—where fruit or flowers are simply depicted in a domestic setting. The great French painter [Paul Cézanne](#) spent nearly two decades painting these, with apples as his [fruit of choice](#). He painted apples alone, apples with oranges, apples with pears, but seemingly always apples. There was something about the simplicity yet completeness of the form of the apple that attracted him.

I had Cézanne on my mind as I read this verse from Proverbs: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (25:11). This is a biblical "still life" painting, likening that common fruit to well-chosen words. But note what the Scriptures do. Well-chosen and fitting words aren't just like apples; they are like apples of gold. And, making it even more precious, like apples of gold *in a setting of silver*.

Thus, well-chosen or "fit" words have both an economic and aesthetic value. They bring order, beauty, clarity, and simplicity in the midst of the tumult, ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity that often characterize our family businesses. How many times have you sensed that words you speak, or words you hear, just don't seem to "fit" with the people or situation? Perhaps they are spoken with anger or carelessness, or without due thought or knowledge. People get hurt, plans fall apart, and relationships sour due to "unfit" words.

The key, according to Proverbs, is to learn to speak "fit" words. They are so beautiful and so valuable. What are "fit" words? Stay tuned...

