

Guiding Principles: Jeremy Jack

By [Tanner Ehmke](#)

[Silent Shade Planting Company's](#) CEO, Jeremy Jack, has gradually moved into the farm's primary leadership role since coming back to the family operation in Belzoni, Mississippi, in 2007 that his parents Willard and Laura Lee started in 1979. Since returning to the cotton, rice, soybean, corn, peanut and wheat farming business, Jeremy has watched the family company grow from 2,500 acres to 8,500 acres today with 30 full-time employees, [including his wife, Elizabeth, sister, Stacie, and brother-in-law, Trey](#). Jeremy points to six principles that have guided the family farming operation on their path of growth and success:

Find the Right People: "Find someone that fits the job and who enjoys what they're doing. I try to ask, 'What do you want to do in life?' Either we've got a fit for that or we don't. If they're a professional, I'm not going to micromanage them. You put the responsibility on them, point them in the direction, line them up and let go."

Understand Personalities: "Understand everyone's personality and know their personality and yours are not the same. If you understand how they work, then a lot of tension goes away."

Manage Resources Smartly: "We're very highly managed. Some people farm by sections, by crop or field. We like to think that we're farming in acres, and every acre stands on its own and pays for itself. We're looking at lowering our inputs and maximizing our output, so managing is extremely tight, making sure we don't have any waste."

Respect Others: "We get along so well because we have mutual respect for everyone. You don't necessarily have to like everybody, but you have to respect others and work together. Everyone's got to work as a team."

Work Safely: "Safety is a really big thing we push for the crew. It's the only thing that keeps me up at night. I want to make sure all my guys get home safe and back to their families. I've let people go because their attention to detail with their life and other people's lives wasn't good enough. I'm not going to let anybody put their life at risk or put anyone else's life at risk when they're working with us."

Work Hard: "We've got a lot to do every day, and hard work is a principle that we've always pushed. You've got to come in, bust it out every day, you go home, you rest up, and you start over another day. Whatever it takes is what you have to give."

Going Pro

By [Davon Cook](#)

When people ask me what business I am involved in, I often answer, "I help ag businesses professionalize their operations." Does that mean I assume our clients run inefficient or unprofessional operations? By no means.

Rather, I observe that as organizations grow and evolve, you recognize that it may take different skill sets and structures to compete and succeed in the future. "Professionalize" seems to be a catch-all phrase that captures putting more proactive attention toward your people and processes than was needed in years past.

"Professionalism" as I use the term, stresses the importance of the people and processes. Traditionally your enterprises have been all about production, but now we increasingly realize how important it is to invest in human capital and procedures that can be scaled to grow with your business. For example, Lance and I are asked to help formalize roles and responsibilities among family and the entire organization. We help design governance systems to clarify positions, decisions and expectations of the next generation of ownership. We help family owners communicate more effectively and in a professional manner appropriate to business. We help implement better



employee training and evaluation systems to get the most from your team. We help codify Standard Operating Procedures to streamline processes and make you less dependent on the one “boss” for quality control. We facilitate peer groups to build your advisory network, and we lead educational seminars like The Progress Coach to continue building management skills in your organization.

The highest return opportunities to further “professionalize” your operation are different for each of you. So ask yourself, what are *my organization’s* 2-3 most pressing needs to upgrade how we operate? How can I get started?

On this theme, my upcoming articles will focus on various “nuts and bolts” of efforts to professionalize Human Resources within an organization. Stay tuned!

Businesslike Stewardship

By [Wally Kroeker](#)

Why be generous? Because that’s what the Bible teaches, right? What else builds a mindset of generosity?

We think about this at [Mennonite Economic Development Associates](#) (MEDA) as we create business solutions to poverty around the world. We aim to give donors a deep sense of whole-life stewardship as we help the poor build productive livelihoods. To us, ministry includes the work week. Daily jobs are a great place to model what it means to follow Jesus; the daily toil of business gives sinew to our generosity.

MEDA tries to model “businesslike” stewardship. Rather than only redistributing wealth, as many programs do, we promote “wealth creation” so micro-entrepreneurs can leverage their own economic destiny.

Our business-minded supporters like giving a hand up to others engaged in similar pursuits, like a village farmer in Africa or a tiny shop owner in Central America. We understand their constraints because *we’ve been there!* We’re eager to help them apply their skills to support livelihoods, communities and churches. A farmer in Nebraska gets a special kick out of helping women in Ghana grow soybeans to boost family nutrition and income. A business owner in Ontario enjoys helping small operators who wrestle with familiar business issues of credit and marketing.

Like all of us, our “clients” are made in the image of God, who on page one of the Bible is busy at work – creating, innovating, being entrepreneurial. Supporters who give to MEDA’s mission reinforce their own sense of being in God’s “work will.”

Faith and Family Business: Words of Wisdom

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

The idea of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs is like the concept of freedom to an American—basic to our existence but difficult to define precisely. Normally we tend to pile up words to capture what we mean. Freedom is an “absence of hindrance” or, positively said, “boldness and vigor in action or belief” or “choosing what we want.”

Similarly, the Book of Proverbs tends to pile up words to give us insight into wisdom, as if it is holding a jewel up to the light from different angles to capture all its facets. For Proverbs, wisdom overlaps with “knowledge” and “understanding” and “competence.” In a vivid metaphor, wisdom is said to “live with prudence, knowledge and discretion” (Prov. 8:12). So precious is wisdom.

But when we get to its definition, we can say it consists of two important things, which I will explore more fully in future columns. For Proverbs wisdom consists of *understanding something* and *acting in a certain way*. The thing you understand is a paradox: that deeds have consequences, and deep ones at that, but that God is supreme even over this “rule” of life, and can and will work things out according to His divine will.

The second thing to understand is that wisdom is basically a mastery over life and our experience of life. Proverbs believes that if you diligently seek and gain wisdom, then your ability to “master” or “figure out” life and its complexity is at your fingertips. And that we could use in both our families and our family businesses...

