

February 2015

Guiding Principles: Steve Henry

By [Tanner Ehmke](#)

Steve Henry's outlook on life is simple: Doing the right things will result in growth. For Henry, CEO of Longview Farms in Nevada, Iowa, that philosophy has paid off since he started farming 250 acres in 1988 with his wife, Laurie, and having grown the family operation to 7,000 acres. Son Scott joined the family farm last year while sons Kyle and Eric attend Iowa State University.

But it's not growth for growth's sake at the corn and soybean operation that has diversified into seed production and custom services. Henry points to five principles for success at Longview Farms.

Define Your Values: Success in character leads to success in life, and is defined by six family values at Longview Farms: Integrity, authenticity, service, stewardship, efficiency, honesty and faith. The farm's family-based values don't stop at blood lines, Henry notes. Family includes employees and business partners. "We want to make sure we treat everyone like family – the way we would want to be treated," he says.

Add Value to the Business: Henry stresses the importance of adding value, like growing seed corn and seed soybeans. Henry also added custom farming and detasseling services that create new revenue streams from existing land and machinery assets. "We've been able to use those services to expand our operation to neighbors," he adds.

Work Off-Farm: After graduating from college in 1983, Henry started his career as a real estate loan officer before deciding to farm. He stresses to his own children the importance of off-farm experience. "It's important to see there's a bigger world out there," he notes. "We don't want farming to ever be a default choice."

Reinvest in the Business: Henry invests in the family business by buying land rather than sending profits off-farm. "Historically, I enjoyed owning and buying land," he notes. "That's been my main focus for expansion."

Build Family Unity: To build the family's sense of togetherness and identity, the Henrys have an annual Family Heritage Day. Steve and Laurie started a small Christian philanthropy and gave their children the reins in decision making, thereby teaching money management, importance of community and how to work together as family.

"No matter whether the farm is successful or if people are a part of the farm or not, we're still family no matter what we do," he says. "Who we are as a family is more important than what we do for our occupation."

Have Some FUN!

By [Davon Cook](#)

In follow-up to my [previous column](#) about being Wise, Kind, and Strong, a friend replied, "Loved the column Davon, but I'd add one more: have some FUN!" He was reflecting after a very successful career as a plant breeder, and went on to recount several fun memories of the project he and I did together.



Based on our work, I know this guy doesn't have to intentionally think about having fun. But it was a good reminder to schedule in fun, along with the strategic plans and goals and weekly lists. Are you and your family and employees having fun? Sometimes it may be "team building," getting away and having a good time. (And by the way, employees do notice when it's been too long since you've done that.) And other days it may be simply having a good laugh on the way to the barn or field.

We've all worked around a person that is just a downer—negative, always looking for the worst in a situation, or just plain unhappy. If you, the leader, aren't enjoying yourself and your team, how do you expect those around you to have a positive day and be motivated? I realize not every day can be a blast, but take a moment to evaluate how your team functions and how your demeanor and actions might influence others. Make sure your efforts, along with great performance, lead to having fun!

Looking in the Rearview Mirror

By [John Stanley](#)

When I was in college, a somewhat famous country singer named Mac Davis wrote a song with the lyric "Happiness was Lubbock, Texas in my rearview mirror." Having experienced this feeling many times in my college career, it became a tradition to sing it as I drove out of town in my red pickup, with my German shepherd riding shotgun.

Rearview mirrors have become bigger and fancier now. I love the familiar phrase on the side mirrors, "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear." Ain't that the truth? In fact, I think things are clearer than they appear too. For instance, I can usually figure out what God has been up to in my rearview mirror.

From time to time it's important to look in our rearview mirrors with regards to our generosity. What's working and what isn't? What giving efforts make my heart sing and which make me feel like I'm just going through the motions?

As an example, for my friends John and Barb, who care about pastors, kids and couples, their rearview mirror examination of past giving has resulted in fewer, larger gifts to higher capacity grantees, more effectiveness and greater impact.

Tell me, what have you seen in your rearview mirror and how has it changed your generosity journey?

Biblical Wisdom in the Family Business: The Paradox and the Promise

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

Last month I mentioned that the middle verse of the Book of Proverbs emphasized the importance of wisdom—"How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver" (16:16). Today I invite you to consider both the paradox and promise of Biblical wisdom according to Proverbs.

We all know that a paradox is an apparent contradiction in terms. CS Lewis used a paradox in describing his *Narnia* series: "Some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again." From the perspective of Proverbs the paradox of wisdom is this: wisdom is both a divine gift and a human achievement. It is something we pray earnestly for, but something that can largely be "figured out" by diligent listening and work. Both prayer and work are necessary. I will explore this paradox in future columns.

The concept of wisdom in Proverbs also gives a promise. If we seek it, and try to learn its way, we will be rewarded. This "reward" is expressed in two ways: "then you will find the knowledge of God" (2:5) and "then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path" (2:9). The benefits of Biblical wisdom are not simply in the spiritual realm; they lead to insight into the great triad of "right" and "just" and "fair." This practical wisdom holds great promise for those trying to discern the right path—in family, business and family business.

