

Guiding Principles: Richard Morrison

By Tanner Ehmke

[Richard Morrison](#), an agricultural business and civic leader in Arizona, is the author of the forthcoming book "[Activate Human Capital: A New Attitude](#)." Richard grew up on his family's cotton, livestock and dairy operation in Arizona and has spent his career dedicated to serving agriculture and advising producers. With 30 years' experience as an [agricultural attorney](#) consulting farmers and ranchers, Richard points to nine principles foundational to the success of today's family farms.

Have faith: "Farmers are partners with God in taking care of his creation and honoring it – not only because it provides for their sustenance, but because it's a miracle. That's the way I feel about every bit of life. I have a tremendous sense of awe and reverence for creation."

Treat people as assets: "Most people I know are either unhappy at work or have been at one time or another. That bothers the heck out of me. If you feel underutilized or underappreciated, you feel you've been pigeonholed or you're in a box. You could very well get to the end of your life and feel like you wasted it. I don't think anyone should ever have to feel that way. Ever."

Build functional teams: "Instead of having to retain all knowledge myself, I've worked hard to develop functioning teams of people who support each other and support me in the process. And frankly, as I get older, that's even more valuable."

Know your finances: "I learned the hard way about the disadvantage of being capital intensive and having a high cost of production compared to the rest of the world. When world cotton prices are 40 cents/pound and our cost of production is 80, it's not going to work. If you don't have a good understanding of your financial resources, you can make some serious mistakes doing what you've always done."

Seek outside opinions: "I believe in using outside consultants to evaluate employee performance and impose a sense of discipline on family members who do not hold themselves accountable to their goals. Viewing it from an outside third person helps prevent difficulties between family members."

Embrace change: "Change is the only constant. My father always said to me, 'Don't be the first one to try something new, but don't be the last one, either.'"

Have structure, discipline and work ethic: "With the proper sense of structure and discipline, including self-discipline, we can make family systems work. It's important we stay on the job and have a sense of personal responsibilities for outcomes."

Invest in education: "I've put a tremendous value on education in my life. Continuing education is important for the sake of improving professionalism inside the family business."

Stand by your principles: "Life is too short to endure relationships that are draining on my own psyche, my own sense of who I am and how I want to be perceived in the world. I've broken off negotiations with people who were unethical in their business conduct even though it cost me a business opportunity I really wanted and could have made money on. I might be a lot wealthier today had I not considered the moral character and business ethics of my customers, but I'm a lot happier with who I am."