

Guiding Principles: Mark Lynch

By [Tanner Ehmke](#)

With three farming locations spread across south Texas, western Oklahoma and southwest Kansas, Mark Lynch of Premium Source Ag understands the importance of coordinating with his 18 full-time employees and up to 35 seasonal employees. Since coming back to farm after graduating from college, Mark has grown the family-owned farm that grows potatoes on contract for Frito Lay from 400 acres in 1974 to more than 4,500 acres today. Mark offers 10 principles that have guided the multi-generational farm through the decades.

Have faith: “You’ve got to have faith in God. God gives me the opportunities, strength, desire and passion to do what I’m doing. It’s a true blessing to be able to wake up and have the opportunity to do what I enjoy.”

Value family: “Family’s important. Agriculture can be demanding, so you have to have family support. Having respect and listening to each other builds that support.”

Follow through: “Set goals and follow through on what you say you’re going to do, and at the end of the day you will be successful.”

Build relationships: “Establishing and building relationships are key to any successful business. You have to surround yourself with good people who have a passion, regardless of their responsibilities. I’m very fortunate to work with individuals that have been with me for 25 to 30 years.”

Strategize: “As a group we spend a lot of time in the fall building our operating plan for the year ahead. It’s important to look at our market opportunities first and then build our acreage plan around those opportunities. My grandfather always told me before you plant, know your market and what it’s going to cost to get there.”

Adapt: “There’s nothing written in stone when it comes to growing a crop. You will always have adversities. Make sure you have this built in to the plan and have the ability to adjust quickly to the circumstances.”

Hold high standards: “From the field to the consumer, we are held to high expectations. We call it Gold Standard Performance. If we don’t work hard to deliver this expectation start to finish, we won’t have a market.”

Be a steward: “The majority of our land is leased. We have been fortunate to have strong relationships with several large land owners – we call them land partners – who have a lot of respect and stewardship for the land. It’s important to operate in a manner that meets or exceeds their expectations.”

Apply technology: “Information is required today to make timely decisions regarding cultural practices, scheduling irrigation, documenting plant health applications and sharing crop information with our customer. It’s important we learn, apply and use technology as an everyday tool.”

Ensure safety: “Food safety is huge in today’s ag business. The consumer wants to know their food is safe. To meet this expectation we are GFSI [Global Food Safety Initiative] certified. We develop procedures, train our people and document every step start to finish. It’s an important continuous process.”

Keys to Effective Employee Training

By [Davon Cook](#)

In last month’s column [Invest in Training](#), I asked you to reflect on your organization’s training and learning strategy. This time we’ll take a deeper look into how to set up your own internal training.

“Training” conjures up an image of a group of people sitting in a meeting room all day with manuals in front of them. On-the-job learning, with one individual showing another how to do the task is likely more common in your organization. I suggest you may need a combination of the two approaches—although without the boring meeting-room stereotype!

First, consider the size of the training meeting. Pairing a trainee one-on-one with an experienced operator is an obvious way to teach how to operate a piece of machinery, or to complete a software task. Yet group meetings may work well to provide overview information to get the team on the same page, or for topics where it’s important for all to hear consistent instructions.

Second, regardless of group size or situation, realize that individuals have different learning styles. Some learn best by listening, some by reading, some by touching and doing, some by writing. For example, I need to write things down to commit to memory. I may never go back to look at the notes, but it helps me process the information.

Given those different styles, be intentional about varying your communication style based on the size of your audience. If addressing a group, provide a handout for note-takers to annotate, provide visual examples as you explain



and, ideally, provide a tactical opportunity to try it. A client recently created a table-top field layout and used toy tractors to explain the reasoning behind GPS layout for planting.

For an individual to whom you are demonstrating a task, *ask* how they learn best and then adapt your method. Invite them to take notes if they wish. Or, with my example in mind, don't assume that they cannot learn if they are *not* taking notes! Point out helpful sections in the user manual (or other written resources) for more information. Provide Standard Operating Procedures for repetitive, detailed tasks. Show them, then allow them to do it themselves while you observe.

Finally, remember that training is an *ongoing process*, not a one-time *event*—for two reasons. First, most of us won't retain all the information in one sitting. A business owner I work with shared that when he starts training a new operator, he intentionally doesn't share everything in the first session to avoid overwhelming them. He gives them just enough info to get started and plans to follow up with more time the next day and the next. Second, we are hopefully *life-long learners*. Information and technology and our businesses are constantly changing—there will be new skills and information we need tomorrow.

These tips will help you develop an effective employee-training program—a necessity in 2016!

Because We First Received

By [Cori Wittman](#)

We're a headstrong bunch in the agriculture community. If we weren't, we would have chosen a different career path that doesn't rely heavily on defying nature year in and year out. But we love to feed the world. To be the helpers. The hard workers. The ones spending early mornings and late nights delivering calves, putting up hay, harvesting crops and doing the million other things that the average person doesn't know is required of a farmer or rancher. Why? For our families and for our communities.

I've seen this phenomenon of generosity modeled by my parents and their farm partners, by our neighbors both locally and globally, by many that may not be farming but have pursued careers in agriculture. The ag community, in my experience, is a generous one by nature.

But are we as good at receiving as we are at giving?

It's uncomfortable to be on the receiving end. Especially for our stubborn, self-sufficient breed. Believe me, after spending five years as a missionary reliant on the support and generosity of others, I know this well. But I eventually came to understand that receiving well is a beautiful and vital dimension of generosity.

It's remarkably easy to focus either on the giver (how noble!) or on the needy recipient (the poor dear, how sad). But when we stop and recognize that we can only give because we have first received, the gap between the two narrows considerably.

When we practice gratitude for the many things we have received—love, grace, June rains, spectacular sunsets, forgiveness, education, opportunity—our giving is seasoned with humility rather than pride. Our generosity is sustained by the knowledge and beauty of first having received. It is a well that can't run dry.

Top of my gratitude list this month: a good, good Father, and a really incredible dad. What's on yours?

Faith and Family Business: Taking a Hit (Proverbs 12:16)

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

One of the most difficult tasks confronting those in family businesses is knowing how to respond either to provocation, attack or even unsubstantiated gossip that relates to you or your business. If we were to look at the world around us, the answer is pretty clear: when someone “crosses” you, respond with quick, direct, and often vehement, counterattack. Bury the rumor. Bury the critic. Case closed.

And, we tend to admire those who are skillful at counterattack. We praise them as people who can “stand up” for themselves, and sometimes also for other people, and “set the record straight.” In addition, you don't tend to mess with people who can take care of themselves this way.

Our experience of living in the world makes it difficult for us at first to hear today's Proverb: “**Fools show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult**” (Prov. 12:16). The central difference between the prudent and the fool, in this passage, is the rapidity with which one responds to an insult. What one might call the “natural” way to respond, with immediate, angry and intense counterattack, is characterized as the way of a fool. Instead, the wise or prudent person is one who doesn't just “wait until tomorrow” to respond but is able even to ignore the insult or take the hit.

Proverbs takes this unconventional (is it unrealistic?) approach to responding to provocation for two reasons. On the one hand, Proverbs believes that God is there, and responding to provocation actually falls under God's job description rather than ours. On the other hand, Proverbs feels that soft, rather than harsh words, get you further in life. There is no easy answer to the problem, but Proverbs should make us cautious about the hasty and heated response.

