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## Why is Trust Important in an Ag Legacy?

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t had taken a long time but Kyle had finally convinced his dad to let him take over management of the north section, consisting of a pivot and a 40-acre pasture. Kyle had big plans for the irrigated ground. Kyle felt like his ideas were continuously shot down, since graduating from college and returning to help on the farm. Now, his dad was finally giving him a chance to show that he had some good ideas too.

But that all disappeared when Kyle saw his dad in the tractor yesterday, tilling HIS field! He got so angry that he drove up and started yelling at his dad. He said some things that, though he regretted it now, were still were circling around in his head. He had stormed off before his dad had a chance to talk to him about it.

The thing that Kyle kept coming back to, as his heated feelings subsided, was the obvious fact that his dad simply didn't trust him. It had taken so long and Kyle thought he had finally convinced his dad that he had good ideas too. He felt the trust he had built up begin to dissolve and was left frustrated and confused.



## **Importance of Trust**

One definition of trust is: "Firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something." But Rousseau et al. 1998 offer a more in-depth definition based in part on accepting your own vulnerability when trusting someone: "Trust



is a positive psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another."

Lewicki et al. 1998 describe trust as compelling us to act based on our perceptions of another: "An individual's belief in, and willingness to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another."

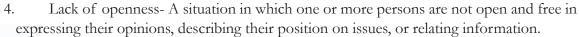
These descriptions offer several important characteristics of trust. 1. The level of trust one is willing to invest in a relationship relates to our perceptions and assumptions of how another person will act. 2. We accept a level of vulnerability when we choose to trust another.

Family relationships can carry over to the family business, while business relationships can in-turn affect family relationships. This is amplified on the family farm or ranch, where family members work together in high stress situations, far outside of the 8-5 workday.

### **Obstacles to Trust**

Trust is not easily given and is even harder to earn back once broken. Understanding the factors that can affect trust in a relationship is a great place to begin to understand how to build, or rebuild, trust. Vaz lists seven barriers to trust in relationships:

- 1. Desire to Control- A situation where one person in a relationship attempts to control the actions, thoughts or emotions of another. This clearly results in a situation of unequal position or power.
- 2. Dishonesty- One or more individuals are hiding information, providing only half-truths, or are attempting to be purposefully misleading.
- 3. Self-Centeredness- The focus is on self and one's own needs, wants and desires.



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- 5. Communication- Required for trust to develop. Failure to communicate effectively leads to a failure of trust.
  - 6. Empathy- Difficulties in relationships definitely happen. The failure to identify with the troubles experienced by the injured person and willingness to work together to address the problem leads to reduced trust.
- 7. Positive Feelings- Focusing on the negatives, becoming jealous of success, or allowing suspicious feelings to fester can all lead to a reduction of trust in others.



## **Building and maintaining trust**

It is much easier to lose trust than it is to build it up. It is important for families, as well as individuals, to be proactive in their efforts to develop and nurture a sense of trust within the family. That foundation of trust also carries over into a family business.

David Lansky, consultant for the Family Consulting Group, identifies three common characteristics of families who are able to sustain a culture of trust:

- 1. Family members are reliable. They do what they say they will do.
- 2. They demonstrate feelings of intimacy. They care about each other and they like being together.
- 3. They are honest with each other. They have open, direct communication they are willing to speak and to listen when difficult things need to be said.

Andrea Bonior, licensed clinical psychologist, expands on these points: "Mean what you say and say what you mean." We learn at an early age to tell when someone is lying and hone this skill as we get older. You're not fooling anyone. This is a quick way to lose the trust of business partners, as well as family members.



Bonior describes vulnerability in building trust. Being members of a family unit already introduces a level of vulnerability. Allowing yourself to expand this vulnerability into the business side of a family business can help to open a new level of trust. Sharing expectations, frustrations, and dreams not only for yourself, but also for the family farm or ranch operation can open entirely new levels of communication.

One way to do this is to have family members write their own Christmas letter, looking ahead 5, 10, even 20 years into the future. Where do they see themselves, the family, and the family operation? Share these letters with one another and use it as an opportunity to talk about goals, expectations, and dreams.

Trust also goes together with respect. We are often more likely to lash out at those we are closest to. Making it even more important to emphasize respect in our close relationships. However, we must also be willing to give our family members the benefit of the doubt. We all have bad days and it is essential to be able to look past it when family members are experiencing one themselves.

It is also important for the family to outline ways of discussing difficult feelings and concerns, without shouting, verbally attacking, or shutting down the conversation. Open, honest communication can be difficult, but can also be rewarding. The relationships built through such an approach can also transfer to the family business. For more information on having difficult conversations, see the Ag Legacy Module: "Difficult Conversations, How do we Discuss What Really Matters?" at AgLegacy.org.

# A lack of communication is still communication

Action or inaction can speak volumes. Beginning the process of building or rebuilding trust may be as simple as a handshake and an invitation to talk. The other person may want the same thing but is unsure about where to start or if anyone even cares. It takes someone to be the catalyst to begin the process, someone who can lead people to develop trust. The catalyst may even be someone not in the family business. Often, however, that someone is the mother in the family.



Assuming we know how someone will act or react in a given situation, even before giving them the chance to act for themselves, is another challenge when two people know each other well. This attitude locks the other person into a particular behavior and does not allow them to change. Open, honest communication and vulnerability involve letting go of previous perceptions and allowing for change and new expectations.

Kacie LaChapelle, a family therapist and business consultant, talks about signals in relationships. We constantly give off signals that indicate whether we are feeling trusting or not. Take time to read the other person's signals. Are they sending signals of mistrust? Also be aware of the signals you are sending. Instead of a defensive response, listen and respond to the other person's feelings. That legitimizes their feelings and provides an opportunity for them to respond.

### **Full Circle**

How might Kyle approach his dad to express his feelings and seek to rebuild a relationship of trust? Is it important to recognize the part that trust plays in your family interactions? Does trust have a place in your

family's Ag Legacy? What steps do you take to foster trust in your relationships?



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