

Productivity increased through leading and managing staff

By SIMON LIVINGSTONE

SOME people from the business community claim there is a distinct difference between leading and managing staff. To this group, leadership means being able to influence the performance of others to achieve goals and management means the planning, organising and controlling functions of operating a business. Effective management skills are important for the successful administration of a business. Likewise, without effective leadership skills businesses will not achieve or reach their full potential. Parts of the corporate world may have the luxury of allowing some of their senior managers to take on a strictly leadership and strategic role and let other senior members perform the management function. But in the farming world, most employers cannot afford to take on only one role. Those who hold management positions in the farming industry need to be both a manager and a leader.

The manager of a business is the formal leader of the organisation. This person holds the position of power. However, just because this person holds the managerial appointment does not mean they are effective in leading or managing staff. Being an effective supervisor is dependant upon more than this source of authority.

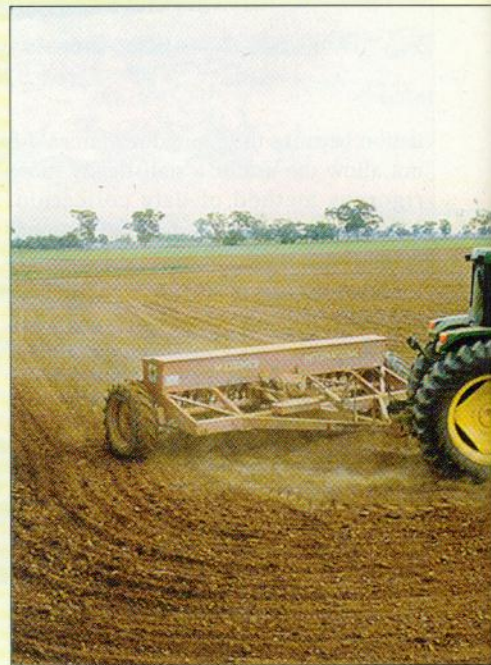
In many businesses there are often several informal leaders employed. Unfortunately some business managers are unaware of the role of informal leaders in their organisation. These staff members are not granted a management title within the business, but they are often effective at getting support and acknowledgment from others working in the organisation. This support may

come about due to the informal leaders extensive work experience and technical knowledge or their effective ability to communicate with other workers. Either way, it is important that the manager be able to identify the informal leaders working in their business and effectively use the informal leaders influence to advantage.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS: There is a large range of skills leaders need to effectively carry out their role. One skill is called 'vision'. All leaders need to have a vision of where they see the business headed and how they see the organisation achieving this goal. Employees expect managers to have a clear vision of where their operation is headed. After all, if the manager does not have the vision, it is unrealistic to expect the employees to set this direction. Having a vision for the business assists in inspiring workers to perform well.

Many workers also expect their managers to have good practical skills. For employees to have respect for their manager, the manager needs to have technical knowledge and be skilled themselves in the jobs they ask their staff to carry out. This is particularly important in the agricultural industry. How can managers expect respect from their staff if they themselves do not understand the details of the work they are asking their staff to carry out?

Another important leadership skill managers need to be competent in is problem solving. Effective leaders often anticipate problems before they arise and actively work on the problem to ensure that it is solved. To solve the problem a leader will often show creativity and a willingness to experiment with new approaches. Leaders do not



wait for someone else to come up with the ideas, they actively look for new projects or ways of improving their business. These employers are not afraid of change. In fact they are prepared to be at the forefront of their industry and be driving the change. There are many good examples in the rural sector of leading producers experimenting with new business practices.

Effective leaders also tend to possess a range of personal characteristics. Having confidence in themselves is important. After all, how many employees would be prepared to follow a leader who is not confident in their own abilities? A leader who has self-confidence, without being overconfident, will instill trust in their staff. Being enthusiastic is also an important trait for a leader to possess. Most employees like to work for managers who show enthusiasm. If managers desire their staff to show enthusiasm to the work they are required to complete, then the manager must also be enthusiastic.

This premise also relates to the issue of time. If employers require their staff to carry out jobs and tasks promptly, then the employer also needs to demonstrate a sense of urgency. Without being authoritarian in dealing with staff, many employees look for a boss who is decisive and assertive.

Successful managers usually set and endeavour to maintain high expectations in the workplace. If the manager has low expectations of performance, then this will breed a culture of low productivity. High expectations set by management are more likely to achieve high



For employees to have respect for their managers, managers need to be skilled themselves in the jobs they ask their staff to do.

the way by offering genuine encouragement and praise.

Managers need to choose a leadership style that is suitable for the situation or the person they are dealing with. What if the manager deals with overseers by telling them in great detail how everything needs to be done on the farm and in the case of a young, inexperienced station hand the manager delegates work to this employee? Successful results

staff performance. For this to occur, managers themselves need to be high performers.

DIFFERING STYLES: Many managers, especially inexperienced managers, lose credibility by being insensitive to their staff's needs. What often happens is that the inexperienced manager becomes so focused on the production side of the operation and in striving to achieve the best production output, fails to maintain employee needs. For managers working their way up the corporate ladder, being insensitive to the needs of their staff may in fact block their own career progression in the company. In endeavouring to achieve high production targets, the manager needs to be able to support and acknowledge their workforce along

in these scenarios are unlikely. In reality, the manager should delegate tasks to the overseers who have the experience to achieve a good result and tell, show and direct the station hand to achieve the desired result.

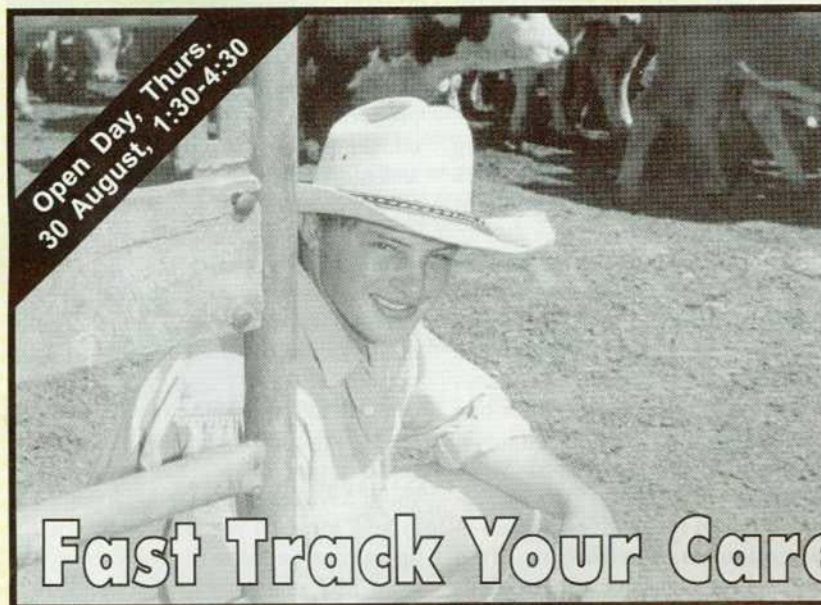
Effective managers do not use any single leadership style. These employers adjust their style to suit the situation and the person. For example, the situation on a grain farm at harvest where employees are working long hours with heavy work demands and associated job stress will require the manager to demonstrate a supportive leadership style towards the workforce. The manager demonstrates support by showing concern for the employees' wellbeing and endeavours to create a supportive

climate. After all, if the staff are unhappy and decide to resign during the harvest period, management is likely to lose out. At other times during the year when there are good relationships in the workforce, the manager may need to use a leadership style which is more task focused in order to ensure the work goals are achieved.

Effectively carrying out an employer's role is no easy task. Both management and leadership skills need to be demonstrated. Leadership is an important factor in achieving success in a business, but it is not necessarily critical. After all, is it realistic to believe that all workers are guided to achieve results in the workplace solely because of the behaviours exhibited by the manager? Clearly this is not the case. Highly capable employees are likely to perform the tasks and duties to the best of their capabilities, regardless of their leader. However, over time, employee performance is likely to decline without the influence of strong leadership.

What needs to be remembered is that leaders are made, not born. This philosophy enables all business managers to improve and develop their leadership skills. Improved leadership skills of the manager can then lead to increased productivity and success of the business. 🐾

Simon Livingstone lectures in human resource management at Marcus Oldham College in Geelong, Victoria. Phone (03) 5243 3533 or email <livingstone@marcusoldham.vic.edu.au>.



**Open Day, Thurs.
30 August, 1:30-4:30**

Agribusiness, Agronomy, Farm Management & Operations, Merchandising, Marketing...
Fast track your career in the agricultural industry with our practical, relevant and intensive 2 year courses.

Our agricultural production courses, **Certificates 3, 4** and the **Diploma of Agriculture** cover dryland and irrigated grain and cotton production, agronomy, intensive livestock enterprises, agricultural engineering and rural business management.

The **Advanced Diploma in Agriculture** provides formalised university credit.

100% employment within 3 months for 1999 graduates of full time courses.

Dalby Agricultural College
Ph (07) 4672 3000 b/h
Fax (07) 4662 4048
www.dac.qld.edu.au



**Dalby
Agricultural
College**

Fast Track Your Career...