

Personal Skills Needed in Agricultural Business

Lesson 3: Personal Skills Needed in Agricultural Business

This lesson outlines personal skills that are necessary for success in agricultural business and describes how the employee can relate effectively to others within an organizational structure. It also discusses why professional development activities are important and how personal conduct affects career success.

Communication Skills Needed in Agricultural Business

Specific jobs require different communication skills; in agricultural business, employees should possess effective interpersonal, verbal, written, and presentation skills. They should be capable of addressing large and small groups under varying conditions and be able to communicate with diverse people, ranging from employer to customer.

In agricultural business, communication skills complement sales skills. Communication skills not only help sell products, but they also sell ideas and promote employees as the right person for the job. There are four basic types of communication skills.

Interpersonal Skills

In dealing with the public, maintaining eye contact during a conversation assures the other person that he or she has your full attention. It also helps establish credibility and demonstrate your sincerity. When speaking to a group, use eye contact to keep the audience's attention and to engage their interest. Briefly make eye contact with each individual. This gives each person the feeling that you are speaking directly to him or her. For example, when introducing yourself at a meeting, look at the faces around the room as you briefly tell others about yourself.

Upon greeting customers, offer a firm handshake and continue to maintain eye contact. This gesture exhibits confidence and friendliness and puts the customer at ease.

Having effective listening skills is vital, especially for a salesperson. To determine what customers need, a salesperson should provide full attention to the other person, listen attentively while the other person is talking, and refrain from interrupting. When the customer is finished explaining what he/she wants, respond and offer assistance. The customer will appreciate this courteous treatment and efficient service.

Verbal Skills

Working in agricultural business requires communicating verbally with coworkers, employers, customers, and a variety of other people both in person and over the telephone. With coworkers the employee should always be sincere, direct, and honest. After listening to the needs and concerns of a coworker, the employee can then respond effectively to that person.

Employees should always speak to their employer respectfully. If an employee disagrees with something his/her supervisor says, the best approach is to wait until work is over and then talk privately and calmly about the problem. Employers are a great source of information and guidance; employees can learn a great deal from them by using effective verbal skills.

Dealing with customers appropriately is essential for success in agricultural business. The employee's job is to provide customers with top-quality service. By speaking clearly and directly and projecting a friendly and courteous attitude, the employee can address the customers' needs efficiently.

To assist customers and suppliers, the staff of most agricultural businesses needs effective telephone skills. Using the telephone requires additional verbal skills: speaking clearly and descriptively so the lack of visual interaction will not present a problem for the caller. During every conversation, the employee should have all the necessary information available and help the caller as quickly as possible.

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Presentation Skills

In any business the need may arise for the employee to make a presentation to a client or coworkers. Whether using a presentation software program such as PowerPoint, or speaking directly to an audience, it is important to get everyone's attention and address the entire group. Just as an employee's verbal skills should be clear and articulate, his or her presentation should also be well prepared and organized. The speaker must think first, then talk, and maximize his or her voice and facial expressions to convey a sense of importance and excitement.

Written Skills

In many agricultural businesses, employees are expected to write various types of documents such as e-mail messages, business letters, and office memos. To write well, it is important to know the subject thoroughly; understand the purpose of the document; select language that the reader will understand; and write clearly, concisely, and logically.

All written communications must use professional language and have correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Never use slang or inappropriate language.

The format of each type of document varies. Even though e-mail tends to be a more casual form of written communication, when employees use this form of communication in a business setting, they should use professional language. Business letters are typically written on the company's letterhead; the layout is usually formatted in block style, as seen in Figure 3.2. Office memos, which relate to specific situations at work, typically have four components that are aligned on the left side of the page: the date, name of the person(s) to whom the memo is directed (TO:), name of the person who wrote the memo (FROM:), and what the memo is regarding (RE:). Often, memos are printed on the company's letterhead. For an example of a memo see Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.2 - Sample Business Letter

Steele Trucking, Inc.
1118 Elm Drive
Columbia, MO 65202
January 22, 2001
Mr. Roger Martin
Midland Dairy Enterprises
710 Locust Ave.
Kirksville, MO 63501
Dear Mr. Martin:
Thank you for your interest in Steele Trucking. Our company does offer refrigerated transportation of food products.
In response to your letter, I have included a brochure of our rates and the different services that we have available. Steele has a reputation for providing high-quality services to the dairy industry for the past 9 years and looks forward to having the opportunity to do business with Midland Dairy Enterprises.
If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 1(800) 798-2914 extension 214. Thanks again for considering Steele.
Sincerely,
Daniel Browning
Account Representative
Enclosure

Labels: Sender's address, Date, Inside address, Salutation, Body, Close and writer's identification

Figure 3.3 - Sample Office Memo

Steele Trucking, Inc.
1118 Elm Drive Columbia, MO 65202 (800)798-2914
January 22, 2001
To: Marie Young
From: Daniel Browning
Re: Midland Dairy Enterprises
I have sent the information you asked me to mail to Mr. Martin at Midland Dairy Enterprises. Please let me know if you receive any more requests for brochures and/or rates.

Labels: Date, Recipient's name, Sender's name, Subject, Body

Personal Skills Needed in Agricultural Business

Relating Effectively to Others within an Organizational Structure

To work within any type of agricultural business, employees must be able to interact effectively with their supervisor. It is important to cultivate a positive working relationship with the supervisor. This means completing all assigned tasks thoroughly, correctly, and on time; following company policies and procedures; and being at work on time.

In dealing with coworkers, employees must respect the rights and opinions of others and recognize that differences of opinion may arise. Tolerance must be extended to customers and supervisors as well. And even though individual opinions may vary, employees should strive to work cooperatively and productively with whomever they meet. If disagreements occur, everyone involved should calmly discuss the issues and find opportunities to compromise by being flexible and receptive. Each employee should do his or her fair share of the work.

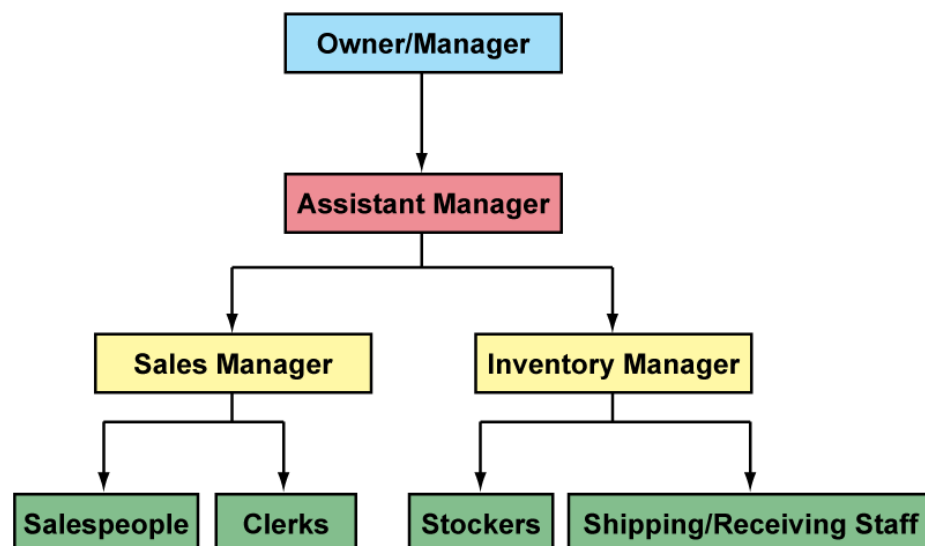
Teamwork is achieved when employees strive to achieve the company's overall goals through working cooperatively with coworkers and supervisors. When employees are recognized for their contributions, they become even more motivated. This enhances the sense of teamwork and promotes productivity.

The relationships among all positions within an organizational structure, from the least trained employee to the owner or senior executive, are commonly referred to the “chain of command.” Many people believe they do not matter because their work is an isolated aspect of the company. But all jobs are important and connected to one another.

All employees must identify the scope of their own jobs so they can determine where they fit within the organizational structure. Employees also need to identify how others' responsibilities are interrelated. Knowing how the organization is structured gives employees a sense of perspective and focuses their attention on the company's short- and long-term goals. Each employee should identify his or her direct supervisor and recognize the consequences of not performing the job properly. If problems occur between an employee and his/her supervisor, the employee must follow the chain of command, namely, address the situation directly with his/her immediate supervisor.

When looking at a business' organizational chart, it becomes apparent that all departments depend upon one another and all employees must cooperate to get the work done efficiently. Figure 3.4 illustrates how various departments are connected within one agricultural business.

Figure 3.4 - Organization Chart for Joe's Tractor Store



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An example of how the chain of command works is a meat processing plant, where each employee is responsible for a particular job. If the truck driver doesn't take the animals to the plant they cannot be processed. If the driver arrives, but the person who unloads the truck isn't there, the animals stay on the truck. Finally, if the animals stay on the truck, the plant will have no product to sell. If a scenario like this did arise, plant management would have to determine who supervised the workers who did not do their jobs. Once responsibility is traced to the manager, shift supervisor, or individual workers, the employee(s) accountable might be reprimanded, put on probation, or even fired. The consequences would vary with each agricultural business and the circumstance.

The traits that enable an employee to relate effectively within an organizational structure also apply to students' relationships at school. Being able to relate positively to both the teacher and classmates contributes to students' academic success. Students learn by completing their homework on time, striving for accuracy, and working cooperatively with others. Occasionally, students may have a particular problem or need to resolve specific questions. They then must determine the appropriate person to contact: the classroom teacher, gym teacher, club sponsor, guidance counselor, principal, etc. Every school has its own set of rules that students should follow. A major requirement of all students is to be on time to class.

Importance of Professional Development Activities

Self-improvement, obtained through participation in professional activities, is a key factor in getting promotions and pay raises. The purpose of professional development activities is to expose employees to new ideas and experiences. These valuable opportunities vary with each agricultural business. Some companies offer training classes, in-service sessions, or other activities that encourage employees to discuss events in the workplace. By sharing ideas with colleagues in related fields, for example at conferences or trade shows, employees become exposed to new ideas, enhance communication skills, and discover strategies for resolving challenges they face on the job.

Professional activities strengthen employees' present skills and teach new skills, which increase their value to the company. A key component to professionalism is keeping current with the latest developments in a specific agricultural business. By learning about up-to-date research, technology, equipment, supplies, and methodologies related to their jobs, employees broaden their understanding of agricultural business and greatly improve their chances of success. Developing an interest in related agricultural businesses increases the employees' technical expertise, which may also provide an effective way for advancement. Many agricultural businesses offer employees opportunities for advancement within the organization that could lead to a promotion and pay raise.

How Employee's Conduct Relates to Success in Agricultural Business

Workers should consider what behavior is appropriate. An employee who respects and understands others is more likely to get a promotion than an employee who is inconsiderate. Every employer expects workers to be at work on time and ready to work. This demonstrates responsibility and dedication to the job. Never spread rumors or engage in gossip, which demoralizes the entire staff, and always refrain from swearing or using vulgar or offensive language. In order to establish credibility with the employer, each employee must be able to handle his/her own finances responsibly. This means balancing a checkbook correctly, paying credit cards on time, and avoiding debt.

To succeed it is important to maintain satisfactory personal appearance at the workplace. Good hygiene practices include bathing regularly, brushing your teeth, and wearing clean clothes. Poor personal hygiene and a messy appearance might offend customers, coworkers, and supervisors. When dressing, workers should also consider what clothing is appropriate for the job. An agricultural journalist and a meat packer would not wear the same type of clothes to work. However, despite the differences in these two jobs and the types of outfits each person would wear, each employee is expected to be clean and neat. If an employee is unsure what attire is appropriate, ask the supervisor.

Personal Skills Needed in Agricultural Business

The employee's attitude can have a positive or negative effect on his/her success on the job. Demonstrating a positive attitude toward customers and coworkers and being nice to others encourages people to respond in a similar manner. Rude or discourteous behavior antagonizes colleagues and supervisors and alienates clients. If an employee has a positive attitude, it demonstrates an interest in the job. Courtesy, accuracy, and prompt service give customers confidence that their needs are being met, so they are more likely to return. Supervisors observe how employees' attitudes affect others in the workplace and this perception is often reflected in employees' performance reviews.

Another important factor in the workplace is expressed by the employee's work ethic. To succeed in agricultural business, all employees must be punctual, honest, and respect coworkers and supervisors. They should also perform tasks as requested, always striving for accuracy. If a company has its own policies and code of conduct, each employee should adhere to it closely.

Many jobs will involve managing money. These jobs should be taken seriously. Careful and conscientious management of the company's money demonstrates the employee's reliability, which could lead to a promotion or a raise.

Another important aspect of employee conduct involves maintaining confidentiality concerning the customers' records. To earn customers' trust, do not discuss information such as bank balances, customer accounts, etc., to any unauthorized personnel or nonemployee. Workers should also respect confidences from supervisors and coworkers.

The consequences of misconduct may range from an oral or written reprimand, which could appear in the employee's personnel record, to dismissal from the company. In either case, if an employee demonstrates any form of misconduct, he/she may receive an unfavorable reference. Typical reasons why employees lose their jobs are having a bad attitude, poor attendance, and incompetence.

Summary

Many personal skills are necessary to advance in agricultural business. Basic interpersonal, verbal, presentation, and written communication skills are required. Every employee needs to understand how workers relate to one another within a business' organizational structure, commonly referred to as the "chain of command." Some companies may offer professional development activities that strive to develop employees' personal skills. The types of activities vary among agricultural businesses. An employee's personal conduct has a major effect on whether that person will succeed in agricultural business. Behavior, personal appearance, attitude, and work ethics are all critical factors.

Credits:

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