

# Talent Strategies for a New Generation



In the shifting terrains of the global job market, ag businesses stand at a crossroads. The increasing retirement of Baby Boomers and a dwindling direct connection to farming have ushered in a critical shortage of skilled workers, exacerbated by a pandemic that has uprooted traditional hiring. Addressing this talent crisis requires more than just filling positions; it demands a change in talent management.

## Understanding unique talent needs

Dr. Scott Downey, director of Purdue University's Center for Food and Agricultural Business, emphasizes that effective talent management in the agribusiness sector relies on more than merely staffing positions — it necessitates aligning those roles closely with a company's strategic objectives. His perspective is informed by over 15 years of research and hands-on experience with numerous agribusiness firms engaged in the Center's advanced management training programs.

Consistency in hiring, evaluating, rewarding and developing talent is paramount. Dr. Downey says, "Avoid hiring simply to fill a vacancy; instead, evaluate and reward based on the qualities you sought during the hiring process."

## Roots in the community

Rural agricultural businesses also face challenges in attracting talent that are different from those of larger companies in urban areas. Ag companies located in a small town have a smaller labor pool to recruit talent from, which can require unique methods to attract and retain top talent. One strategy that can help includes forming a connection with area universities or high schools. Provide local students with training opportunities, facility tours or mentorship opportunities. This bond can be attractive to candidates as it shows community involvement, helps create brand awareness for the business and can be an employment pipeline for filling future open positions.



## More than a paycheck

In a competitive job market, the rewards need to be more than financial. "It's about creating value beyond the paycheck," Dr. Downey says. Today's workforce seeks opportunities for professional development, coaching, mentorship and participation in a culture that fosters personal and career growth. "We see today that particularly younger employees have far less tolerance for bad management," says Dr. Downey. Adapting to the varying expectations and motivations across generations is crucial.

## Embracing diversity: broadening the field

"The agricultural sector must embrace a broader definition of diversity," Dr. Downey recommends, highlighting the need for various backgrounds, thoughts and experiences in the industry. Such inclusivity is critical for addressing hiring challenges and bringing innovative solutions.

For agribusinesses, the path forward involves

cultivating a genuine curiosity and appreciation for agriculture in their recruiting efforts. Whether finding someone capable of talking with a farmer or recognizing the potential in someone from a non-agricultural background who is passionate about producing food for the world, diversity in recruits will sow the seeds for a successful future.

## The platinum rule

In Dr. Downey's words, we must not adhere to the "golden rule" but to the "platinum rule" — treating employees not as we would like to be treated but as they WISH to be treated.

The industry's imperative to adapt is clear. With employees from Gen X to Gen Z prioritizing work-life balance and personal development, companies of every size must create environments that value employee input, provide mentorship and offer clear avenues for advancement.

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