

# **Module 10**

## **Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership**

### **Module Outline**

Introduction

The Executive Summary

Oral Presentation

Communication and Public Relations

The Media and Press

Telling the Agricultural and Rural Story: Working with Government & Public Agencies

The Three P's

From the Outside In

Speak in One Voice

Solutions, Not Problems

Deposits in your "Reputation Bank"

Telling the Story

Announce Good Deeds

Introduction to Ethics

Business Ethics

Ethical Myths

Ethics in Decline

Developing a Code of Ethics

Why Ethical Practices Lapse

Characteristics of Ethical Culture

What About Me?

Peak Performance Pyramid of Leadership

Conclusion

## **Learning Objectives**

The learning objectives for this module are for participants to:

- Write an executive summary of their business plan to be used as a communication tool with lenders, investors, partners, suppliers, and family members.
- Be able to present the story of your business and industry in an educationally stimulating and positive manner to the community, media, and political influencers.
- Know the fundamental foundation of ethical practices and tactics in business and for your own daily lives.
- Be challenged to take on a leadership role as you represent your business and industry to maximize your potential.

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

### Introduction

We can see the light at the end of the tunnel on our business journey. As we wrap up the business planning process, we will focus on communication, ethics, and leadership within the dynamic and challenging business environment. The business plan you have developed can be an important tool to assist you in communicating your business strategy to both internal and external audiences. Realize that conducting a business ethically is becoming increasingly important as high tech products and solutions facilitate global business transactions. The leadership of your business, as well as taking leadership positions in industry and community groups, is imperative as the agriculture industry becomes more complex and consumers' demands grow increasingly specialized.

### The Executive Summary

We are now coming to the home stretch of writing your business plan. While an executive summary of your plan is shown as the first part of a business plan, it is usually the last section you write – that is because it is a summary. An executive summary should be succinct and to the point – no more than two to three type-written pages. Its purpose is to provide the reader with a quick yet thorough overview of your business plan. It should be interesting and hit the highlights of your business plan. Detailed information about your business plan is included in the main body and appendices.

The executive summary is the billboard for a business plan and it gives the first impression of your company. It should be well-written, customized and tailored to the reader. For example, for a lender you would include highlights that will encourage them to consider financing your business. You would alter the summary for a different audience, like a community group.

A typical executive summary for an existing business would include: 1) highlights of any historical trend analysis; 2) business accomplishments; and 3) a realistic appraisal of key financial trends including numbers, ratios concerning profits, cash flow, equity growth, liquidity and break even analysis. All of these can be valuable to the reader.

Next in your summary, you could move to financial projections and illustrate how different scenarios and key assumptions might influence the business' bottom-line. If you are a *start-up business* this is where you would begin building your case for potential success.

Also, you could include such things as briefly highlighting and discussing your marketing and risk management plans including special conditions such as contracts, niche markets, hedging, options, insurances, government programs, etc. Following this, you might summarize operational activities and any attributes of key employees and managers that will carry out these activities. Some business executive summaries stress new initiatives and possible short-run and long-run plans for capital expenditures and acquisitions.

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

Finally, an executive summary could include special management priorities, such as management successors, the phasing-in of a new partner, or steps in a possible exit of a partner or key player/stakeholder.

The bottom line is to provide a reader a road map of how your business' financial projections will be accomplished in a dynamic business environment. You should include marketing plans, as well as operational, risk management and alternative strategies, and how a possible exit plan would all work. Whether the business plan is for internal purposes - to share with family members, management, and/or employees; or external purposes - to share with lenders, suppliers, and investors, **the goal is to communicate where your business is going**. Match your executive summary and business plan to your business' purpose.

### **You, Inc. – Executive Summary Outline**

Develop an outline of the major points you would like to communicate in your business plan's executive summary.

### **Oral Presentation**

Some of you will be presenting your business plan orally. Your presentation can be thought of as a kind of executive summary with questions at the end.

Try and keep the presentation to 15 minutes or less allowing for questions at the end. Introduce your business and tell the audience why it is important to you and others. Include in your introduction your business' history, mission statement, and goals. Next, choose about ten or less key financial highlights to discuss.

In presenting the highlights, have visuals (for example, PowerPoint slides) of key financials, such as breakeven calculations, return on assets, cash flow scenarios, and growth of net worth. Round-off numbers to whole numbers or to the nearest hundred dollars. Also, include and explain any key scenarios and assumptions.

Some other things to consider in your presentation would be highlighting key marketing, risk management, and operations components. Some of you will want include highlights of the SWOT analysis as a starting point of the presentation (Refer to Module 2 for details).

Remember, when making an oral presentation, to have confidence and passion in your business because you know it better than anyone else. There is a saying "if you can't communicate the main points of your business plan and executive summary on a simple napkin, it is too complex!" However, do not expect to get your next loan or investment money from a plan written on a napkin!

### Communication & Public Relations

After going through the process of developing a business plan, you will be more prepared to tackle communication challenges and/or public relations issues related to your business. In previous modules, we have discussed the importance of having a financial and operational plan as part of a business plan. Having a well thought-out communication and public relations plan can also positively impact the financial and goodwill bottom line of a business. Part of a good risk management program is a public relations plan that can help you be proactive in working with the neighbors and the press – in general, a good public relations plan can help you tell the story of your business.

So, whether you are considering a farm expansion that could include increasing the number of poultry or livestock or building new facilities, make a point to tell the story of your business. For example, one Wisconsin dairyman while building a new 700-cow dairy expansion took the opportunity *tell his story*. His communication and public relations efforts included:

- Hosting a picnic for the entire community;
- Providing tours of the expanded business;
- Developing a professional brochure which stated the economic benefit of his expansion to the area;
- Highlighting that a single dairy cow contributed \$13,000 in economic multiplier impact to the area;
- Showing that for every thirteen dairy cows it directly or indirectly employed one person in the community; and
- Acknowledging all business persons in the community that the dairy impacted, from the feed supplier to the dry cleaner that provided services for uniforms.

He explained to a group touring his new facility that when a business opens in town they have a ribbon cutting ceremony. Agriculture producers need to do the same thing, because expanding an agricultural business provides an opportunity for a producer to *tell his or her story* and highlight positive aspects of the business.

More businesses are now developing a paper-bound description of their operation. A description could include business goals, pictures and descriptions of family members and employees', and the roles they all play within the business. For example, a paper-bound business description could be a useful communication tool with a potential landlord.

Your communication and public relations program needs to also include a proactive plan for responding to possible adverse events or worse-case scenarios. Such a plan can assist you in acting more objectively in the event the worst happens. An adverse event plan should include such things as a disaster recovery program for human, equipment and livestock accidents with chemical, or manure spills, fire, theft, flood, tornado, hurricanes, terrorist attacks, and other disasters. You can contact local authorities including police, fire, Red Cross, and FEMA who often have a format to assist you in developing such a plan. Because of the uniqueness of each business it is

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

important for you to think through possible scenarios and situations and designate who will do what and when. Someone needs to be assigned to talk to media, insurance agents or other people of interest.

The following are tips to remember regarding public relations:

- Be honest
- Show pride
- Don't be defensive
- Avoid controversy
- Stay calm through tough questions
- Keep answers short
- Avoid jargon
- Use first names
- Keep good eye contact
- Avoid "off the record" comments
- Avoid "no comment"
- Attempt to see the cup half full i.e. stay positive.
- Remember that under stress, what normally is wet gets dry and what is normally dry gets wet!

### The Media and Press

Many businesses may shy away from developing and sending press releases to avoid working with the media. Some producers and entrepreneurs have become their own press agent, particularly in smaller media markets and community newspapers.

How does one develop and send a press release?

First, include the words "Press Release" at the top of your letterhead in bold type. You should include your name and address, who is involved, what has happened or what is happening, or the description of a new product, service, or change in the business. Always think of the five W's and one H (who, what, when, where, why, and how).

Know how media outlets prefer press releases. Most states have a state newspaper association online. Some like to receive releases by fax, mail or e-mail. Which agricultural magazines, newsletters, and radio stations or television programs are a good fit for your news? Yes, as a business entrepreneur, you should recognize the value of being in the press since it is free advertising and is an opportunity to establish credibility for your business and its products and/or services.

The following are some points to remember about press releases:

- Use press releases when you have something that deserves to be noticed. Do not abuse them.
- Would your news appeal to a wide range of audiences?

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

- What makes your business interesting to the public? For example, are you hiring more people in an economic downturn? Have you expanded into a new market area?
- If a photo applies, supply it and send your release early in the day and at the beginning of the week to maximize exposure throughout the week in daily and weekly newspapers.
- A follow-up call to a reporter can be useful to determine if they received your press release.
- In your press release, try and place the most important information up-front in the first paragraph.
- A press release should be interesting and quickly get to the point. This will promote engaging a journalist and making them interested. Once a journalist is interested, you can provide more background information.
- Highlight benefits to an audience rather than hype – for example, a press release might explain how time and money are saved.
- Provide contact information and make sure you proof read for typos, grammar, content, and accuracy.

**You, Inc.:** Develop an outline for a media press release about your business.

### Telling the Agricultural and Rural Story: Working with Government & Public Agencies

Now let's go down another road and discuss tips one can use in working with the government, the general public, and stakeholder groups regarding agriculture and rural areas. People involved in agriculture must have a public relations strategy at multiple levels, including local, state, regional and national strategies. Government and public relations will be critical for both the success of the agricultural industry and your business. Whether it is environmental regulation, dealing with paperwork, tax compliance, local zoning, or public ordinances, a strategy and plan are becoming necessary to position the agricultural industry in a positive light from the public's perspective.

Here are a few rules that need to be considered in taking the high road in a public relations program:

#### The Three P's

When dealing with the government or public agencies, think of the three "P's:" priorities personalities and principles.

- Priorities: You need to understand the rank and order of government agendas and how issues and priorities can change overnight. Past cases of BSE or mad cow disease in Canada and the western U.S., as well as spinach contamination

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

and passage of Proposition Two relating to animal welfare in California are prime examples of overnight change in priority.

- **Personalities:** What are the politicians' and leaders' convictions and beliefs, and how do your issues and concerns fit into their projects and agendas?
- **Principles:** Understand an interest group's stance on issues. While the party in power may be liberal or conservative, they will still listen to the opposite party for fear of alienation of that group.

### From the Outside in

View and talk about your business and industry from the public's and government officials' perspective – use their language. What are the technical issues versus the political issues? Technical issues are more objective or “black and white.” Political issues are more emotional with a “gray area” that is wider. View issues from the public's interest, not your own perspective. Take for example the terms, *chemical application* versus *crop protection*. It is quite obvious that the term *crop protection* sounds much more appealing to the media and public than the term *chemical application*.

### Speak in One Voice

The agricultural industry is extremely fragmented with many different factions, each having their own representatives, agendas and initiatives. Frequently there is a “divide and conquer” attitude when outsiders deal with the agricultural industry. To counter this happening, it is important that agriculture and agribusiness speak as one voice, which can provide strength through a more unified front. Ag leaders and action groups can play an important role in facilitation and consensus building from a time, money, or leadership standpoint. Aligning oneself with other community groups with similar goals can be beneficial as well.

### Solutions, Not Problems

When dealing with government and oversight agencies, situations are frequently in the crisis mode. This could be a disease outbreak, an animal welfare issue, or an environmental spill. In these situations, try and be proactive by providing alternatives and solutions rather than just throwing problems and defenses in the air. Being seen as a “problem solver” will usually result in more positive results. If talking to the press or an elected official, often they will get distracted or move on to another topic. Bring the conversation “home” by steering it back to your core message.

### Deposits in your “Reputation Bank”

Make deposits into your “reputation bank.” In some cases, this may be going beyond the minimum and being self-regulating, or being seen or observed as being proactive to a public cause. Then, if and when adverse conditions or a negative event strikes your industry or business, you can draw upon your previous goodwill and political capital that you have demonstrated in the past. Know your elected officials and work to develop a relationship before you need something. They are often in your area at events, so go to the event and be sure you introduce yourself.

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

### Telling the Story

The following simple tips can help you tell the agricultural and rural story in a more compelling way.

- **“Take Control”** – These two words represent the whole *telling your story* process in a nutshell. If you are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the agricultural industry and your business, and if you take a little time to practice what you plan to say, you can “take control” of a meeting. When you do that, you’ll be effective in delivering messages about agriculture. But remember, we only “control” the words we speak or write ourselves. So use them wisely!
- **Know your audience** – In a media interview, the audience is *not* the reporter. It’s the viewer, listener, or reader. You should think of an interview as a way to reach an audience *through* the reporter. However, if you are meeting with a Member of Congress or a staffer, that individual *is* your audience. Take the time to learn a little bit about any factors that might influence this person’s decision making.
- **Determine the goal/objectives of your communication** – Why are you having a meeting? What is it you want to say? How will your comments at the meeting advance the cause of agriculture? If asked to conduct a media interview, be sure to consider what it is you are trying to accomplish! There is no “requirement” that you participate in an interview simply because a reporter asks you to. But, it may be in your best interest to participate.
- **Determine your key “message” points** – There is a lot to tell about agriculture, but do not try to tell it all at one sitting. After you have determined your overall communication goal, consider the two or three things that will most help advance the agricultural issue highlighted at this particular meeting or media interview. Select three strong, concise message points and use examples, personal anecdotes, and supporting material to communicate your point. Keep on topic by “bringing it home,” referring back to your core message.
- **Use the power of numbers** – Statistics lend credibility and authority to any meeting or interview. Reporters, in particular, love to use them. You should employ three or four key numbers that support your message points and story line. And, know the origin of the numbers! However, numbers should be employed judiciously. For example, suppose you provide 12 statistics or data points. By doing that, your audience can pick and choose from the ones they like most. On the other hand, if you only offer two or three strong statistics or data points to support your case, you have taken some control over how they might be used.
- **Use quotable language** – If you have an opportunity to use analogies, metaphors, comparisons and contrasts, do so. If you can think up some “sound bites” – quick catchy ways to make a point – then use them.

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

- **Know the facts** – Once you are comfortable with your message, be sure to take the time to learn the facts that support your message.
- **Don't bluff** – There's no point to bluffing – and doing so might come back to haunt you.
- **Don't volunteer negatives – but do be prepared to deal with them** – You should never volunteer “negative” aspects of the issue being presented. If, for example, you voluntarily offer-up criticisms of your opponents or rivals, you may sound as though their point-of-view has substance. Always be prepared to deal with questions about aspects of agriculture as an industry or your business that may have been criticized or challenged by others. Do your homework, before being put on-the-spot! Keep relevant facts in mind and refrain from bluffing.
- **“Bridging”** – Bridging is a technique that uses simple phrases to help you escape from a discussion that is not advancing your objectives and change it into one that is. For example, from time-to-time it may be necessary to turn a negative question into a positive answer. Some common “bridging” phrases are:
  - “What's more important...;
  - Let's put that into perspective ...;
  - That reminds me...;
  - I'm not familiar with that specific case, but I can tell you that our industry's policy is...;
  - Another thing to remember is...; and
  - That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...”
- **Be judicious in the use of professional buzzwords, acronyms and jargon** – Not everyone you talk with will understand the complexities of agriculture. If you must use jargon, define it as you go along.
- **Be prepared** – This seems so obvious. You should always anticipate the toughest, most negative, nastiest and potential “surprise” questions. Remember: you may not want to answer a particular question, but that doesn't preclude someone from asking it! You should already know what some of the questions about an issue might be. Therefore, you should develop, in advance, an answer that will defuse each difficult question. Discuss your story with others such as your employee team, your loan officer, consultant, etc., to get different perspectives and to uncover questions and issues that may not have occurred to you. Note: You should always be armed with the most up-to-date facts.
- **Speaking “off the record”** – As a general rule, try to imagine how your comments would look if they were to appear in a newspaper. Doing so will help you in achieving more discipline and improve your chances of taking control of a meeting or interview. In a media interview, you should always assume that everything you say before, during, and after the interview will be “on the record.”

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

- **The microphone is always on** - In media related situations, you should always consider a microphone to be ON at all times. Likewise, you should assume that a television camera is always ON, even if it is not pointed at you.

### Announce Good Deeds

Agriculture's story is best told through real-life examples of our activities in our local communities and markets. One of the best ways to get this story out to a large audience is through a local newspaper. Below are some tips for getting your message out this way along with some ideas for different types of activities that make attractive stories.

- **Involve a Member of Congress** - Whenever possible, use a quote from a member of Congress to help announce your industry activity. For example, lenders at a Farm Credit association have worked with their marketing people to coordinate a press release announcing their associations' sponsorship of some young farmers to attend agricultural marketing courses at a major land grant university. After working with the offices of the Congressional Representatives, a press release was developed including glowing comments from both members about the producers and Farm Credit. Not only does this enhance the news value of the story for local papers, it ensures that those two members of Congress know about a new agricultural education initiative and Farm Credit's involvement.
- **Use a picture** – Local papers always look for pictures of local people doing things in the community. Often, these papers don't have the budget to hire full-time photographers but rely instead on photos taken by individuals. Some ag leaders have gone to Washington, D.C. to have their pictures taken with their Senators after receiving an agricultural award. Pictures were made of the Senators congratulating the individuals.
- **Build a relationship with and closely monitor local media** – Many negative stories about agriculture come about because the writer of the story is largely ignorant about agriculture.
  - Make an effort to know the writers of the local papers. Determine which reporters cover agriculture, local businesses, etc.
  - Work at building their understanding of agriculture or your industry. Invite them to cover your next producer meeting. Send them announcements about the things you do for the community. Most local media outlets are very hungry for local news to report. You can often get your story placed simply by sending it to the right reporter.

### Introduction to Ethics

Recent economic and business events have increased the awareness of ethics. From Wall Street to sports stars, and families to personal conduct and accountability, ethics have been placed in the spotlight. Let's examine some of the basics of ethics including its definition, myths, and reasons for decline. Doing so should help you in developing your own code of ethics.

**ROADSIDE CHAT #1: Are first impressions usually correct when evaluating someone's business ethics?**

Here is an example that should answer your question.

It is time to elect a new ethical world leader, and your vote counts. Here are the facts about the three leading candidates:

Candidate A: Associates with crooked politicians, and consults with astrologists. He's had two mistresses. He also chain smokes and drinks 8 to 10 martinis a day.

Candidate B: He was kicked out of office twice, sleeps until noon, used opium in college and drinks a quart of whiskey every evening.

Candidate C: He is a decorated war hero, a vegetarian, doesn't smoke, drinks an occasional beer and has had no extramarital affairs.

**Which one of these candidates would be your choice?**

If you selected Candidate C, you just elected Adolph Hitler. Candidates A and B are Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, respectively.

Don't feel bad if you elected the bad guy. I did too. This provides us with a backdrop to the all-important topic of ethics and the code of conduct.

**Business Ethics**

Ethics is the moral code by which we live and conduct business or the concept of right and wrong. Ethics are derived from the cultural, social, political and ethnic norms by which we were raised as children. People seldom ponder their value system, but act instinctively on the basis of it.

Harvard Business School conducted a survey of its alumni to find out what it needed to teach its future business leaders. The response most cited, above technology, globalization and leadership, was morals and ethics.

Many people believe if they follow the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you) they are safe from ethical dilemmas. Unfortunately, most ethical dilemmas in the business, economic and financial world are "gray areas" and can be troubling.

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

### Ethical Myths

Many feel that business ethics is new and is only for philosophers, academics and theologians. Some consider it a passing fad, with no practical relevance and that ethics cannot be managed.

However, business ethics is a management discipline. It involves working through confusing and stressful dilemmas. Usually, there are a few easy and simplistic solutions. One can be unethical and still operate within the law. While the law serves as a guide, it should not be considered an absolute limit for institutional and personal behavior.

### Ethics in Decline

A recent study of Iowa farms found some intriguing results. Nearly 90 percent of respondents to a survey felt that ethical standards of the general population had declined; and, over one-half felt that ethical standards of farmers had declined.

Also, over 90 percent felt that someone must obtain an agreement in writing rather than a trust a person's word. Many thought that ethical standards had declined because of the loss of respect for authority.

#### **ROADSIDE CHAT #2: Could you give examples of how a breach of ethics has negatively impacted an actual business?**

Example 1. During the 1990s, one of the top investment analysts at Merrill Lynch touted several internet stocks. According to the Attorney General of New York, Merrill Lynch intentionally misled investors in order to gain a lucrative investment banking business from its clients.

Example 2. Enron is one of the biggest success stories in American business history. The company literally came from nowhere to dominate the energy trading market by mid-year 2000. On the lists of America's Most Admired Companies, Enron rated second in its *Quality of Management*. Despite all of this, Enron collapsed in a titanic heap that is still smoldering. But how did this happen? Enron failed because at its very core it did not make integrity a fundamental value of its business. Because of this, trust was lost. Once that happened, the ship could not be righted!

### Developing a Code of Ethics

There is a process for developing a code of ethics which begins with an individual or business self-examination to identify values held by the individual or business. It is about prioritizing moral values of conduct of the business and ensuring behaviors are aligned with those values.

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

The following is a list of ethical values that should be considered in a code of ethics:

- **Trustworthiness** - loyalty, honesty, integrity
- **Respect** - privacy, dignity, courtesy
- **Responsibility** - accountability, pursuit of excellence
- **Caring** - compassion, kindness, giving, consideration
- **Justice and fairness** - objectivity, impartiality, consistency, equality
- **Civic virtue and citizenship** - abiding by the law, community and public service, protection of the natural resource base and environment.

### Why Ethical Practices Lapse

What causes ethical standards to lapse? Sometimes businesses just simply hire “bad apples” - people who are corrupt! In other cases, it’s a bad barrel. A business’s culture can be poisoned with unethical overtones. Often, the pressure to prosper produces an environment that creates unethical behavior, and employees act accordingly.

### Competitive Pressures

Sometimes competition becomes so intense that a business’ survival is threatened. Managers can view unacceptable practices as acceptable and look the other way. Bribes and under-the-table kickbacks are normal business procedures in some societies. Distinct cultural differences in an international business environment can create a situation where what is legal and acceptable in one country may be illegal or not accepted in another. In the future, codes of conduct and ethics will be seriously challenged by business globalization

A code of ethics should outline behaviors a business or individual should display. Consider the following business and personal standards when you have to make an ethical decision.

#### *Business Standards:*

- Management activities conform to a standard, which is commonplace among management;
- Good management wants to succeed and be profitable in the confines of ethics and a code of conduct;
- Obedience of the law is the minimal ethical behavior - an attempt is made to operate well above what the law mandates; and
- Emphasize leadership positions when ethical dilemmas arise.

#### *Personal Standards:*

- Choose the option that offers the greatest good for the greatest number of people;
- Take actions that an objective outside panel or professional colleague would consider proper;
- The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you;

## **Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership**

- Would you or your associates feel comfortable explaining your activities on national television, Facebook, or MySpace?; and
- Would you be comfortable explaining your actions/behavior to your child, spouse or your parents?

### **Ethics in Stressed Situations**

There will always be people who are willing to risk reputation and livelihood through unethical behavior. In stressed situations, these conditions can escalate. It's easy to be ethical when things are going well, but when conditions are unfavorable there is a greater likelihood that ethics may be compromised. For example, a producer who is under stress and can't meet payroll or a sales person who needs one more sale before the end of a month that would lead to a large bonus can cause pressure to act unethically. Again, the importance of having an ethical code and sticking to it is critical because failure to do so can have results that follow you for the rest of your life!

### **Characteristics of Ethical Culture**

Organizations with a high degree of integrity exhibit a clear vision of integrity throughout the organization. It is embodied from the top down. Reward systems, both financial and recognition, are aligned within an organization's culture, procedures and practices. Everyone understands that all decisions have an ethical dimension.

These businesses are obsessed with fairness and accountability. Responsibility starts with the individual and filters to employers and family members.

A code of conduct must be clear and understandable. Yes, this includes standards and procedures that support every day business activities. Don't just take the three P's approach: Print it, post it, and pray everyone reads it. Rather, a code must be clearly communicated and discussed with suggested changes in behavior. There must be mutual agreement among everyone involved.

Leaders must demonstrate and communicate expected ethical attitudes and behaviors. These include putting programs and discussions in place to support and enhance the ethical culture. In some businesses, ethical behavior has become legendary and part of the community.

A culture must be developed for people to confidentially report alleged violations of an ethical code or acts of misconduct. Owners, employees, suppliers, and family should abide by the code and be aware of the consequences of improper action. To keep the ethical environment dynamic, a review of formal and informal standards and factors that might undermine the ethical culture should be discussed.

Also, learning activities should be in place that support and update the ethical climate. If you have employees, they should be educated about ethics through workshops and by discussing hypothetical situations. For example, what would you do if you found out that an employee was stealing feed for his or her horses? Positive practices should

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

encourage individuals to contribute spontaneous efforts in support of ethical behavior and goodwill.

### **ROADSIDE CHAT #3: Can you give us a positive twist on ethics?**

A father and son were in the dairy business. Dad allowed his son to take over the financial record keeping that had been done by Mom. The son got “bigness on the brain” and “paint fever,” which resulted in a machinery, technology and equipment run up of over 25 open accounts ranging from \$400 to \$25,000. When confronted by the lender and his father, the son left the business with the debt in a New York minute! During the next five years, the father worked extra construction jobs along with his farm work to payoff every account and lender! Now, that’s good old-fashioned agricultural character.

### **What About Me?**

Many of you are probably asking, how does all this apply to me? Ethical tools and a code of conduct can be far reaching, the lack of which can implicate anyone using a business computer for personal gain, accepting gifts as bribes, or taking money under the table. For someone who is a lender, it could be not maintaining the confidentiality of financial and personal information.

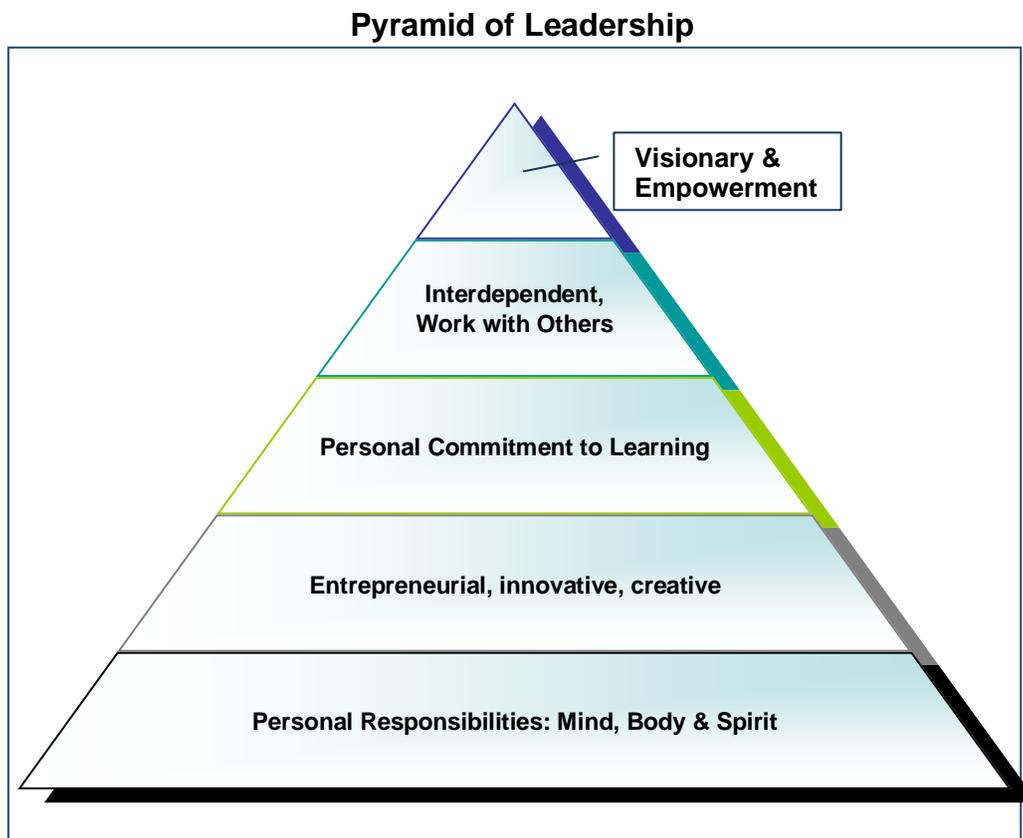
### **Walk the Talk**

Some people talk the talk; others walk the talk. How you treat and deal with your fellow producers, suppliers, employees, informal network, and the community are real-life demonstrations of ethics. It is how we behave when no one is watching both in the workplace and in your personal life. When in doubt, err on the conservative side. As a wise experienced dairy farmer once stated, “you only get one chance at a favorable first impression, and you are only as good as your last impression.”

**You, Inc.:** List five company values to include in your code of ethics, such as trust, integrity, and dependability.

### **Peak Performance Pyramid of Leadership**

This whole business journey now comes down to you and your commitment, accountability, and ability as a leader in a dynamic (changing) agribusiness environment. Historically, your parents and grandparents may have built their business by being independent and working hard as “doers.” In the future, your success as a leader will require you to also be interdependent, but to work effectively in a quickly changing environment. You will need to be tri-focal, capable of inspiring vision while being strategically focused on short and long term goals, yet knowing how and when to be flexible and able to adapt to change in executing your game plan.



The foundation of the Pyramid of Leadership starts with your fundamental **personal responsibilities**, of which you are independent and accountable. First, do you have clarity and readiness in mind, body, and spirit? At agricultural leadership conferences I attend it is interesting to notice the number of peak performing managers and CEO's who exercise early in the morning. Taking time to disconnect from technology to regenerate mind, body, and spirit and just hear the silence are all important components, with the ultimate goal of taking time to think positively about the upcoming day.

Next on the pyramid, leaders in the future will need to be **entrepreneurial, innovative, and creative** in accordance with their business vision, mission and strategies. Are you proactive, taking initiative when an opportunity presents itself and not taking a "wait and see" attitude? Do you achieve your desired results consistently, with the results impacting the goals you have established? Are your actions aligned with your value systems? Are you sensitive to others and to issues they may have?

Leaders will need to develop multiple intelligences, relying on an integration of analytical, logical, and objective intelligence while at the same time being intuitive, street smart, and displaying emotional intelligence - a balance of IQ & EQ. Do you have a **personal commitment to learning and growth**? As an agricultural knowledge leader, spending two to six hours weekly committed to learning is a realistic goal. Ask yourself these questions: Do you follow through on learning goals for yourself and others in the

## Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership

form of mentoring, and are you able to integrate this process for a desired result? Have you conducted a self-assessment, stretching and challenging yourself to learn, building upon your strengths and hiring co-workers, outsourcing, or developing alliances to complement your deficiencies or weaknesses? Do you make a supportive path for others? Are you willing to make small sacrifices that lead to larger rewards for yourself and others?

As we move up the pyramid, do you have what it takes **to become interdependent and work with others**? Ask yourself: Are you a network builder who seeks creative consensus and shared understanding for a win-win at multiple levels of decision making?

### **ROADSIDE CHAT #4: Shouldn't leaders be independent?**

Here's a basketball example. Suppose you could pick two "old school" basketball leaders for your team - Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. Why would they be good choices? Other than being highly skilled players they each had an un-coachable talent which was to make the players surrounding them better. Not just those who were playing with them at the time, but also all their teammates, coaches, owners, managers, and also the game of basketball. Are you the Larry Bird or Magic Johnson of agriculture?

As a leader, do you acknowledge others' generosity? Do you sometimes provide leadership to a situation while perhaps adapting to a situation and becoming a supportive team member. Or, if a circumstance presents itself can you become a role player and not play a lead role? Do you make resources available for creating energy and synergy with others in shared goals and shared results? Does your interdependent side of leadership seek first to understand then to be understood? Can you communicate non-defensively, provide open and honest feedback, and communicate with clarity, focus, conviction and candor across different functions and roles?

At the zenith (top) of the pyramid is your ability as an agricultural **visionary**. That is, one who facilitates, energizes, and empowers others to buy-in and own a stake of what's being produced, offered or created so that an investment and reward to the stakeholder occurs. It requires creating a supportive environment which motivates others to achieve a desired result. All of this is accomplished by being competent, accountable, and trustworthy within a value system built on the foundation of strong character.

## **Conclusion**

This is the end of our long business planning journey. Yes, there have been those long roads of readings, exercises, action steps, and mini-assignments that have led to the development of your business plan. Your business plan should have mentally prepared you for game conditions down the road of success. Hopefully, this learning experience has been challenging to you, testing your critical thinking skills, while being somewhat entertaining with stories and also bits of wisdom and philosophy.

## **Module 10: Professionalism, Communication, Ethics, and Leadership**

In order to get the most out of this process, strive to use your business plan in day-to-day activities, tweaking it as you go and remember to update it annually to reflect changes in your business and the external environment so it can be a guide to success. The good part is that once you have completed your business plan, it is not nearly as hard to update it as it was starting from scratch!

Remember that agriculture is the foundation behind a strong economy and society. Now and in the future you will play a pivotal role in this important endeavor. We sum up this learning experience with these words:

We greatly appreciate you and your efforts in this class!

Thanks for your hard work, and best wishes for a successful agricultural business!