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### GOOD HELP IS HARD TO FIND?

For more and more farmers, labor is a major business problem. What to do? How to improve? We think the following is a great place to start. It is adapted from an article by John Towler, a psychologist professor at the University of Waterloo and senior partner in a management consulting firm in Waterloo, Ontario.

One of the most natural of all human impulses is the desire to be in control and do things our own

way. When we are allowed to be independent, we become self-confident and proud of our accomplishments. However, when our attempts to show our independence are thwarted, we lose confidence in our abilities and may begin to doubt ourselves. This can, and will, lead to frustration and unhappiness.

Knowing how to develop independence and self-confidence in one's employees is an important skill for anyone who needs to work effectively with people. Done properly, it leads to a happy and efficient operation. Done improperly, it inevitably results in tensions, doubts, and problems.

The drive for self-control appears very early in life, usually around the ages of four or five. This is the time when children want to do things for themselves without any parental assistance. Sometimes a battle ensues between the child, trying to tie his or her shoes or button up a shirt, and mom or dad, who know that they can do it better and faster. This usually leads to the child's refusing help and crying, "I can do it myself!" This is nothing more than his or her demand to be independent and to exercise some control over the environment. Initially, it will take longer and, yes, the buttons may not match all the buttonholes exactly, but this will improve with practice. Most important, allowing or encouraging the child to take control means that he or she will develop confidence and be ready to show individual initiative when another task is encountered.

As interesting as this is, you may be wondering what it has to do with managing people. Well, remember that adults are children who have grown up, and they often react in many of the same ways.

**THE BEST POSSIBLE WORKFORCE IS ONE MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO WILL DO**

### THINGS WITHOUT BEING TOLD.

We all have this drive to take the initiative and be in control, but often our bosses or organizations won't allow this basic need to surface. Yet, we have never met an owner or a manager who doesn't wish for a staff of bright, energetic workers with lots of initiative. Part of the answer lies in the way you treat your people. Do you allow them to be in control, or do you restrict them so much they feel they can't do anything on their own? When they do attempt to show their initiative, do you welcome this, praise it, and support it? Or do you criticize their efforts, chastise them for their mistakes, and discourage them from ever doing this again? We usually get exactly what we expect from people, and if you expect that your workers cannot or will not seize the initiative, it may well be that you have made it impossible or uncomfortable for them to do so.

There probably aren't many farmers around who wouldn't like their workers to be self-starters. If people tend naturally to be independent, what is going wrong? There are three factors here that

must be taken into account. One is the prior experience of your people. Are they really ready to take control, or have their parents or bosses taught them that showing initiative leads only to trouble and criticism, and thus to feelings of shame, guilt and doubt? If this is your situation, then you have either made some poor hiring decisions or you will have a big job to overcome the damage of prior experience.

The second factor is the existing organizational system and working environment in which these workers are expected to be self-starters. Take a good look at it. Is it rigid and formal, with clearly defined rules and spheres of authority? Is there a lot of political infighting to maintain power and position? Is the atmosphere one in which everyone looks after himself or herself, first and foremost? If this describes your organization, you have problems that don't involve merely stifling people's creativity and initiative. Even the most energetic people wither and die in organizations like the one just described. The smart ones leave for better jobs and the best turn up as members of your competition.

The third factor to examine is you. Are you really prepared to give workers their heads and not only allow, but also encourage, them to use their brains? Or do you secretly feel that you will lose control or even that your subordinates will show you up with their achievements? If so, your problem is really bigger than theirs.

Let's assume you are convinced that most people want to show some initiative and that you are more than willing to have this happen. What do you need to make it become a reality? First of all, you must set the stage and make it clear that you will welcome signs of individual initiative. In addition, you must make sure your workers know it will be okay to try and to fail. After all, no one is perfect 100% of the time and unless you make it safe for your people, they will never try anything, for fear of being fired if they fail.

Probably no one will believe you at this point; people will adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude. This is normal and fair, and you mustn't expect immediate results. To overcome this, you should do two things. The first is to take the initiative yourself by giving employees tasks that will require their taking control and using their abilities without supervision. Explain what you want done, what the end results should look like, what resources they can call upon, and when you want the task completed. Then go away and leave them alone. When they have finished the task, review the results and their performance with them. Be prepared to find that their approaches or solutions are not the way you would have handled the situation. Just look at the results. Are you really trying to make everyone do things your way? Or are you prepared to accept that others' ideas may be just as good, if not better?

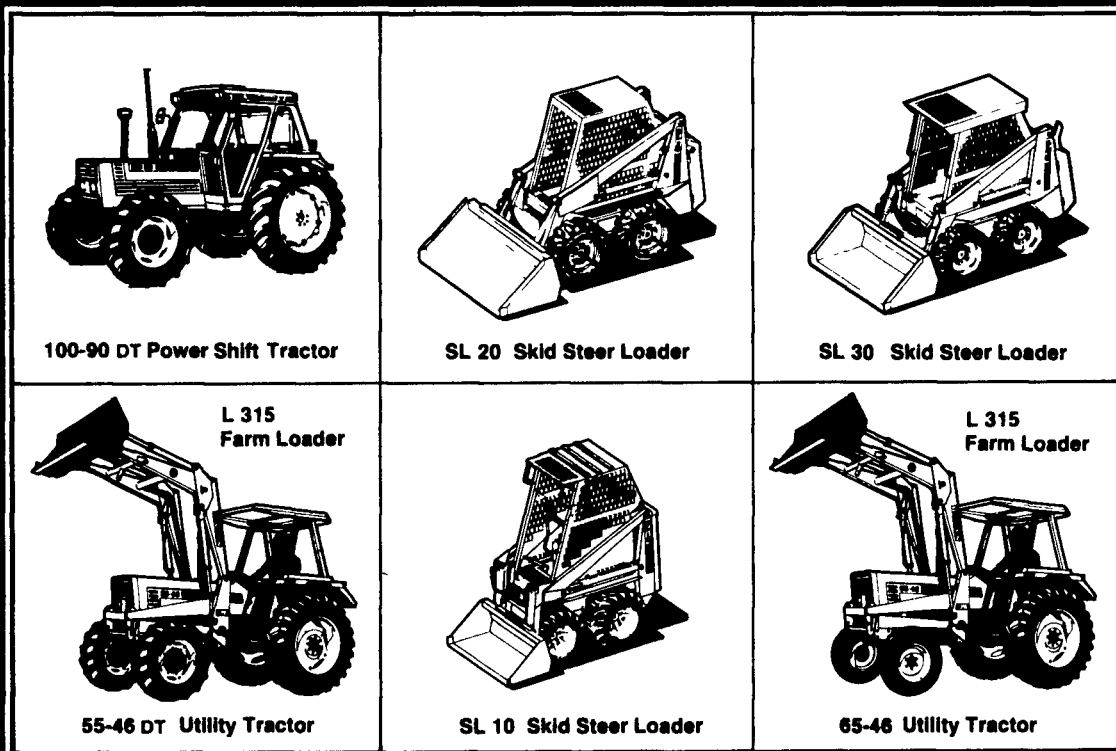
Finally, be lavish but sincere with your praise. Nothing succeeds like success, and the person who is praised for taking control will do so again. If there are things you want to criticize, be gentle and, instead of finding fault, offer suggestions on how the work might be improved next time.

Helping people become self-starters is rewarding for everyone. At the very least, it will lead to a happier and more enjoyable environment.



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