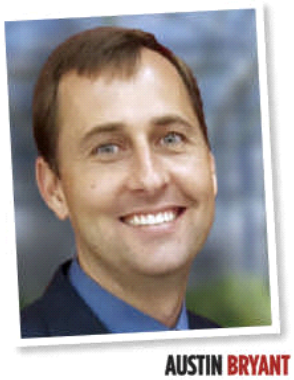
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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You’re Not Born With Leadership—It’s Developed!

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Earlier this summer I had the opportunity to rewind my life and go all the way back to the years 1999-2000 when my fellow state FFA officer team and I had just finished an intense year of service with the Florida State FFA Association. At that time, as an FFA state officer, my job was to travel throughout Florida presenting educational seminars for high school students and faculty that emphasized the importance of agricultural vocational education and promote our association. Our FFA team was also tasked with presenting multi-day leadership programs for students who aspired to be more than just members of the association.

When attending a state FFA convention, the excitement is palpable. There are thousands of excited FFA students attending for a week of competition, education and recognition. The atmosphere is basically a five-day, 24-hour pep rally of high school students who are hyper engaged in professional growth through competing in Leadership Development Events. It’s exciting to see young people so engaged and interested in leadership and agriculture.

The FFA association is where the bulk of my leadership training came from. This field of education is continuing to grow as companies seek to make their current employees more engaged and effective. In our company, human resources (payroll) accounts for one of our largest annual expenses, only second behind the seed and liner expenses. Trying to make this large gross annual expense more efficient and engaged seems like a no-brainer!

Without digging up the old curriculum and doing a deeper dive into leadership development from 25 years ago, there are just a few key points I wanted touch on.

Everyone in the organization must carry the mindset “There is room for improvement in me.” Improving yourself isn’t a goal in itself; it’s a mindset that leads to the creation of a series of actionable goals and ultimately creates a change in lifestyle. It’s a humble attitude that acknowledges there’s always room for improvement. Pride in your own work is the key to accomplishing greatness. Often it’s nice to be recognized by others for doing a great job. However, if you’re only driven by receiving the recognition of others, sooner or later they’ll fall short and you’ll falter.

In every task there should be intentional purpose in thinking “How can I do this the most efficient way and at the

highest standard possible?" Of course, with this intentional attitude of improvement, a new floor-sweeping employee today could soon turn into department management tomorrow. This form of leadership comes from within and not directly expressed to others. It's leading by example. Setting a bar of excellence that others will follow can make you indispensable.

Bring out the best in others. This point may sound simple, but it takes time and maturity to really understand it. A true leader's success isn't measured by personal accomplishments, but by the performance and development of the team around them. When you start thinking about how to make your coworkers better and how to support them, you've just shifted from simply doing a job to leading a team. That shift is powerful. You begin to look at everything through a wider lens. And when you start to pull the best out of others, you usually find your own performance rising right along with theirs. This all starts with setting that high standard of excellence for yourself and you'll find that others will follow.

Always be missed. This one came straight from my dad. "If you miss work and nobody realized you were missing, you might as well be replaced." Being missed means you are valuable. It means your work ethic, attitude and presence set a tone that others rely on. Being missed doesn't require a title. It doesn't require a raise or recognition. It requires showing up with purpose, doing what others overlook and bringing consistency to the team. When you work like that, people notice, especially when you aren't around.

Be more than just an employee. Just as those young FFA members are attending leadership programs for self growth and improvement to rise through the ranks of their FFA organization, so must we strive to find ways to improve ourselves. You cannot wait for someone to hand you a leadership role, a raise or an opportunity. You earn those by seeking out chances to grow. Sidney Weinberg, nicknamed "Mr. Wall Street," led Goldman Sachs for 39 years. He started at the firm as an "assistant" janitor. He was task-oriented and brushed hats and cleaned shoes with purpose. People noticed and he was promoted to the mailroom. He then re-organized the mailroom to make it more efficient. Look for tasks no one else wants, but needs done. Take ownership of something that needs fixing. Read a book or learn a new skill. These aren't just ways to get ahead; they're ways to build the habits that define a real leader. The truth is that leadership shows up long before the title ever does.

Back in my state officer FFA days, I would end my chapter programs with a thought for my fellow members: "What will you leave behind in your chapter when you've graduated?" Leadership isn't about being the loudest or the most liked; it's about leaving behind something better than what you found, whether that's in your workplace, your team, your family, your church or your community.

Leadership isn't something you're born with. Developing leadership skills can be hard—just as hard as breaking old bad habits and replacing them with better ones. But that's exactly what you're doing, and people will notice. **GT**

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