



Ten Commandments of Labor Management

Agricultural employers should use effective methods in managing personnel problems, especially as employees in agriculture become legalized. The following Ten Commandments are offered as principles to follow when managing employees.

Commandment #1: No good deed goes unpunished.

When was the last time you bailed an employee out of jail, and later the same employee turned around and abused your trust?

Many agricultural employers take the approach that if they are "nice" to their employees, the employee will overlook some of the company's faults. But that isn't always the case. Don't be lulled into complacency just because you treat your employees "like family".

Commandment #2: It is better to know than to be comfortable.

What you don't know can hurt you. As an example, you may take the position that if you don't know that your foreman is getting "kickbacks" from employees, you won't get in trouble. The fact is, foremen are your legal representatives, and as such they can subject the company to liabilities as if you yourself committed the offense.

Commandment #3: It is better to deal with an employee than an ex-employee.

There are times when you may feel that the only solution to a problem is to get rid of it--in other words, terminate a bad employee. However, it is usually better to try and turn a "lemon into lemonade" rather than risk an unlawful discharge suit or an unfair labor practice or discrimination charge. This approach should not be interpreted as taking the cowardly way out. It is only recognizing the fact that it is more cost effective, in the long run, to first attempt to work out your problem with the employee while he is willing to listen to you. After you terminate an employee, what chance do you have to communicate with him and resolve your differences?

Commandment #4: You can catch more friends with fairness than with treachery.

In the book *Games People Play*, Dr. Erick Berne discusses how we play "games" with people around us.

The intent of these games is to snare other people by using gimmicks to gain a psychological upper hand. A good example of this is an employer who "saves up" incidents of bad performance or misconduct of an employee over a period of time. In playing this "game," the employer never reveals to the employee these problems until "performance evaluation" time. During the performance evaluation, the employer pours out all the "saved up" problems and asks, "How do you expect me to give you a raise in light of all of these problems?"

To "play fair," the employer should have told the employee what he was doing wrong as it occurred, so the employee could have improved along the way. Most "games" an employer plays are self-destructive because they usually undermine the efficiency of the business in the process.

Commandment #5: You have met the enemy, and he is the "Boss" or, supervisors, the "unguided missiles."

Employers who place too much reliance on their supervisors are doing themselves a disservice. The most damaging type of supervisor is the "gung-ho" foreman. He believes that the only method to spur production is by threatening and intimidating his subordinates. In order to "re-direct" this enthusiasm, employers should give supervisors more instruction on how to motivate workers in positive ways rather than using the "whip-and-a-chair" method.

Commandment #6: Use "Miranda Warnings" not, "I got you, you SOB."

Employees resent being criticized for conduct that no one told them was prohibited. At the very minimum employers should inform an employee when his behavior or performance is not up to company standards.

Commandment #7: Don't make excuses, make good.

Admitting that you have erred is not admitting anything other than that you are human. Making excuses by blaming other people or conditions does not help build trust between you and your employees.

Commandment #8: Time does not heal all wounds.

Hoping that a personnel problem will be resolved by itself is just wishful thinking. Often, the problem will get bigger and more difficult to resolve.

Commandment #9: People rise to their level of incompetency--you fire them--then they sue you.

Have you ever promoted a production worker to a foreman's position, but he turned out to be a total flop? Then you fire him? Who was at fault? Probably you, for two reasons. First, just because a person does a job well doesn't mean he can supervise other people performing the same job. Second, human relations skills are not always natural skills - they must be learned.

Before you elevate a worker, make sure he is the right person for the job and that you have properly trained him to do it.

Commandment #10: Never speak ill of the dearly departed.

Defaming an ex-employee is asking for a lawsuit. However, this doesn't mean that you can't respond with truthful statements about a previous employee to a prospective employer. The important point is to have documentation to back up your facts.