



Save stock, avoid damage, and improve work by tapping minds.

Supervisory Decision-Making Styles

- “I tell ‘em what to do, how to do it, and when. There’s no other way. Someone has to call the shots for this operation.”
- “It is usually a mistake for me to finalize production commitments before checking with the crew members. After all, they know what’s happening out there.”
- “I put most problems into my foremen’s hands and let them take it from there. My role is to make sure they know what needs to be done, answer their questions, and get out of the way.”

Deciding to Manage

As with delegation of tasks in general, managers make important choices about how much to involve family members and hired employees in making decisions. Division of functions between “those who think” and “those who do” is not as normal in agriculture as in larger, more bureaucratic organizations. But while farmers, ranchers, and hired managers typically engage in more “doing” than bank and factory executives do, many like to carry all of the thinking load, too. There are disadvantages to doing so.

Unless a grower-manager has all the information relevant to a decision and close control of its implementation, his or her efforts to do all of the thinking may well net a poor-quality decision, the full burden of getting it across to the workers who will carry it out, and frazzled nerves. More importantly, a strict separation of manager and worker roles, with regard to thinking, conveys the message that only one (or a select few) need to feel responsible for anything except what they are specifically told to do. How much stock might be saved, damage avoided, spoilage reduced, and work improved if the minds connected to all the hired hands were tapped?

“Sure, I’d like to have everybody around here caring about the stock, machines, and pack quality,” one orchard operator argues, “but if I don’t act decisively, my men just won’t respect me.” Many managers and supervisors use similar reasoning to explain their reluctance to share their decision-making responsibilities. They