

Communication and Problem Solving

Information is the lifeblood of every organization. It flows through agricultural businesses every day. Communications with workers are integral to hiring and training, helping them understand the operation and their place in it, assigning and coordinating work, learning their ideas and problems, building trust, and most other aspects of the working relationship between employer and employees. Of course, communication among workers facilitates both performance and the social relationships that make the workplace more than simply where the job is.

Different types of information are needed at respectively different times in the employment relationship. Some things are more important to communicate upon or before hiring (e.g., name of foreman, normal work schedule, rate of pay); some at termination (e.g., last day of work, reason for quitting or firing, where to pick up a final check); some at regular intervals (e.g., which trees to prune today, hours worked by each crew member, how performance this year was evaluated); and some at irregular times (e.g., which cow showed signs of distress, where to meet the contractor, how to use a tool safely and what could happen if one doesn't). As described in previous chapters, some communication is legally mandated. For example, employers are obligated to display many posters and notices, to give migrant and seasonal farm workers written information on basic conditions of employment, to provide pay stubs detailing deductions, and, in most states, to inform employees who are seriously injured on the job how to file for workers' compensation.

Communication occurs through the spoken word, written word, and gestures or "body language," and most managers use them all. Much information can be efficiently delivered in written form. While words on paper are often thought of as "formal communications," perhaps with legal implications, some are informal notes that serve important purposes—such as alerting the herdsman to a cow acting abnormally, or letting foremen know that the grower wants to meet with them later. Informal, oral communications are more numerous, frequent, and ongoing. Just because an exchange is oral, however, does not make it informal. Selection interviews, performance evaluation meetings, presentations to the farm advisory board, and verbal warnings all can be considered formal.

