

- If spoken communication is not working well, ask the employee to write part or all of the message.
- Watch the speaker's lips.
- Observe body language.

Supervising across language barriers is not easy, but no one has to accept it as insurmountable. Build bridges by using clear English, checking comprehension, working to understand all workers, and encouraging efforts to speak English. Doing these things builds essential communication skills that ultimately strengthen the operation.

Cultural differences are often subtle and loaded with nuances that are difficult to grasp. While most managers have to make some adjustments to deal well with people from other cultures, they need not and cannot change their essential personalities and own cultural values. Overriding rules-of-thumb for managers in today's diverse American landscape are:

- Try to remain aware of the natural tendency toward ethnocentrism — an orientation presuming that all people share one's own cultural values and perspectives.
- Don't expect that workers from other backgrounds want to or can assimilate into the dominant culture.

Staff Meetings

Meetings of supervisory staff, work crews, another defined group, or all employees are good for providing information with a more personal touch than written form and for taking up matters on which multiple people can contribute to discussion. Farm and ranch operators use them for such purposes as reporting on the status of the business, formulating business goals and plans, making major personnel decisions, and coping with specific operational problems. Field supervisors and foremen commonly make announcements, provide safety training, and discuss other operational matters at less formal "tailgate" meetings.

Meetings can be scheduled on a regular or as needed basis, depending on business size, seasonal needs, and managerial preference. Having a regular time for more formal meetings, for example the first Thursday morning of each month or annually just before harvest, allows people to plan for and around the meetings. Additional sessions can be arranged, of course, in times of major change or crisis. A meeting of the management team could take place over coffee in the staff room, kitchen, or shop. Production crews might get together at the start of a day in the location where the work takes place or in a building where equipment is stored.

No matter when and where a meeting is held, structuring it with an agenda, preferably shared with participants in advance, helps everyone to prepare and use the time together efficiently. General suggestions for conducting a meeting are to:

- Start and end the meeting at the scheduled time.
- Begin with some informative announcements.
- Encourage all in attendance to share their ideas. Ask individuals about their thoughts if they appear reluctant to speak.
- In a family business, invite all family members to participate in periodic meetings whether they are involved in operations, ownership, or both.
- Set a comfortable atmosphere for open exchange of information and ideas.
- Keep notes of the decisions made, responsibilities delegated, and time frames established.
- If consistent with time limits and company style, consider asking for a round of brief comments from everyone at the start of the meeting, the end, or both.

The Exit Interview

Sooner or later every employee leaves. The most pleasant type of exit is when a trusted long-time employee retires. Such a termination is usually based on the mutual agreement of employer and employee.

Another type of termination is one that is employee initiated. When this is due to a better opportunity for the employee, it usually results in excitement for the employee and disappointment for the employer. On the other hand, if the employee is terminating because of dissatisfaction with the job, both the employee and employer may feel angry, though perhaps relieved as well. A third type is dismissal by the employer. When an employee is fired, both parties often harbor some anger.

Regardless of the circumstances of termination, understanding can be gained and antagonisms reduced through an exit interview. When well executed, an exit interview can yield valuable information about company morale and the attitude of employees toward their supervisors, management, and coworkers.

Exit interviews with both seasonal and full-time employees can produce useful information. One employer who has a large number of seasonal employees does the exit interview in a group setting. Four potential products of a deftly conducted exit interview are:

- Mutual understanding about the reasons for the termination
- Information about how operations are really running
- Suggestions for improving work procedures, alleviating problems, and developing better employee relations
- Reduced exposure to fallout from residual hostility