

Southern Region Middle Managers News



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A WORD FROM THE MIDDLE MANAGERS CHAIR

Leading and Managing in a Changing World

Jeffery Young, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service (Jeffrey.young@uky.edu)

Greetings from Kentucky, where Fall has arrived in all its splendor (Many of you know what I'm talking about). Maybe it's the multitude of changes occurring in a few short weeks that makes it more dramatic - the leaves, the cooler temperatures, the harvest - I love Fall! Our roles as Middle Managers are filled with change also. Whether it is identifying and on-boarding new employees, celebrating a long and fruitful career of a retiring Extension agent, coaching and mentoring multi-generational teams, or dealing with the latest crisis, change is a normal part of our lives. It is something we are all comfortable with to a certain degree and what makes Middle Managers uniquely positioned to positively impact Extension at the local, state and national levels. So, as you think about the change in seasons (hang with the analogy Florida and Texas) I hope you will also think about your incredible value to our organization and continue to lead in an ever changing world.



Challenges and Options in Recruiting and Retaining Talented Extension Employees

Doris Heath, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Southeast District Director (dheath@vt.edu)

Even though we were from various Extension systems throughout the Southern Region we seem to have something in common – the challenge of recruiting and retaining talented employees. In today's work environment, many career options and many opportunities exist for people to seek to be employed. It is no wonder that we would be having this discussion about recruitment and retention at the Middle Manager session during the 2015 Program Leader Network Meeting held in Orlando, Florida. So the question we are all facing is how does Extension distinguish itself in a highly competitive job market and attract and retain talented professionals? According to the Census, unemployment is now running at less than 6% nationally and many corporations and government agencies are struggling to find and keep valuable employees. The changing work force demographics, such as the shrinking of the most desirable labor pool (25 to 34 year olds) and the negative impact downsizing has had on employee loyalty, have led many businesses to search for answers to recruiting and retaining employees. Middle Managers discussed this topic as well as dreamt about the perfect world of recruitment and retention in the future. Many ideas, thoughts and suggestions were shared in helping all of us think differently when recruiting and interviewing candidates - regardless of the programmatic area. Some of the recruitment challenges discussed included:

- Retaining Extension agents in rural counties
- Retaining employees past their first year of employment
- Many Extension services still doing face-to-face interviews and not embracing new technology such as Skype, Go-to-meetings, or other virtual meeting software
- Starting Extension salaries not keeping up with the overall cost of living

- Extension salaries not keeping pace with salaries offered in other educational fields
- Mentors assigned to new agents may be located far from the new agents making the face-to-face mentoring less effective
- New agents not able to develop key relationships in the community to establish themselves

We continued our discussion on how Extension services in the southern region are currently recruiting employees. Many of the techniques used in our public sector were similar to those used in the private sector:

- District Directors and agents going to career days at universities rather than relying on persons from their Human Resource departments to do the recruiting
- Some Middle Managers make connections with specific university instructors, and ask employees to make referrals.
- Some states are receiving a return on their investment in internship programs.
- One of the more interesting ideas was one state suggesting offering a vehicle for agents to live in a more urban area but commute to their rural county where they were employed.
- One Middle Manager from our group maintains contact with qualified candidates that interviewed for a position but did not get it. He reaches out to the person from time to time as to where they are in their career and keeps them abreast of career opportunities as they arise.
- We were reminded several times about the importance of using social media (LinkedIn; Facebook, or Twitter) to network with potential candidates and post positions.
- Writing and posting job descriptions that are specific to a position seemed preferable to using generic ones.

We ended our work session brainstorming in terms of the being in the ideal situation of being able to hire and retain employees:

- We'd like to have an on-going recruitment process rather than when it is needed to fill a specific position;
- Some suggested we could have current Extension agents create a "month in the life of an agent" document or video and post it to on the organization website for potential candidates to review and get a better understanding of the expectations of an Extension agent;
- We need to create more interesting job descriptions;
- We could hire (or make volunteer!) recently retired Extension agents to go around the state and give support to or mentor new employees and assist them in their transition into the organization;
- Some Extension services conduct exit interviews with employees to maintain a continuum of the needs of employees and how best to meet them;
- We could use a recruiter/head hunter;
- We couldn't overlook the significance of using social media; and consider bringing candidates to campus and have all of the District Directors participate in the interviews which allows more options to place suitable candidates into several positions.



BEYOND "SOUTHERN REGION MIDDLE MANAGERS NEWS"

As part of our effort in upgrading the look and design of our newsletter, we recognize the need to adopt a name for the newsletter that better reflect who Middle Managers are and what we do. Some proposed names (up to you to envision a logo for each of them....) include (in random order) "The sandwich", "Leading times", " Making things happen", " The motivators", "The high impact", "The labyrinth", "The jugglers", "Extension works with Middle Managers", "Middle Managers bridges", "Middle Managers in the next 100 years", "New heights" or any other suggestion of yours. Share your ideas and we'll be discussing this at our April MM Conference call.



SHARING MIDDLE MANAGER SUCCESS STORIES

HERD BUILDER CATTLE SALE – Teaching Community, Economic, & Workforce Skills

Stan Windham; Alabama Cooperative Extension
System; windhst@aces.edu



-Herd Builder Sales Team

All Middle Managers recognize the need to help Extension professionals working in their system make an impact in Community Development, Economic Development, and Work-force Development. This should be done in an innovative and resourceful way. The Herd Builder Cattle Sale held annually in Uniontown, Alabama during the month of August, touches Alabama Cattlemen in all of these areas. The event is led by County Extension Coordinator, Kevan Tucker from Clarke County, Alabama.

This year's sale boasted 230 bred heifers that averaged \$3,164 each and 43 open heifers that averaged \$1817 each. The sale was conducted with a diverse team of Extension personnel that served 78 buyers representing 5 States.

The Herd Builder project has proven to be an economic development project by producing gross sales of over \$5.4 million and by retaining superior genetics for southeastern cattle producers. Additionally, development dollars are spent locally rather than by feedlots in the mid-west. From a community development perspective, the sale has brought Alabama Counties together to discuss not only the cattle sale, but also how to improve the communities and counties represented at the event. Consequently, a sense of community has been established through this sale. Also, workforce development has become a major thrust of the sale. Producers are taught marketing, salesmanship, and record keeping to name just a few skills learned.

What once was just considered a value added cattle sale – is now an economic and learning opportunity for Alabama Cooperative Extension System professionals and beef cattle producers alike.



Stemming the Tide on Obesity through Lifestyle Changes

Gerald W. Jones, Alcorn State University Extension
Program, gwjones@alcorn.edu

Obesity in children and adults is a leading health concern in Mississippi. Obesity contributes to the major chronic disease killers in the state: heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke and even cancer. Child and adult obesity in Mississippi has increased dramatically over the past 15 years and is expected to increase significantly in the next 20 years. In response to the obesity epidemic, the Alcorn State University Extension Program (ASUEP) focused its efforts on obesity prevention.

MIDDLE MANAGER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Reading of the Month



In her article “The behavioral event interview: Avoiding interviewing pitfalls when hiring” [J. Public Health Management Practice, 2006 12(6):590-593], Dr. Claudia Fernandez first presents the five problems that typically plague

the old standard interviewing style: (1) Talking more about the job than the candidate; (2) Asking for strengths and weaknesses; (3) Getting a verbal resume during the interview; (4) Asking hypothetical interview questions ; and, (5) Hiring for chemistry rather than fit. Recognizing that “in human behavior, the past predicts the future”, Dr. Fernandez then presents a more contemporary approach to interview – the one called “the Behavioral Event Interview” (BEI). The interviewer who uses BEI seeks to establish the candidate’s effectiveness based on actual experiences. The five steps of BEI are (1) List the critical performance areas for the job, (2) Create open-ended questions that query the candidate’s experience in those tasks, (3) Gather data on the Situation, Task, Action, and Result (STAR) in the candidate’s answer, (4) evaluate the answer for demonstrated job performance, and (5) compare their answers to other candidates’ answers (can be done with a point system). Enjoy!



Thus, the ASUEP Health and Wellness Program was developed and segmented into three components: (1) foods and nutrition, (2) home and community gardening, and (3) physical fitness. Delivered and implemented through churches, schools and in six communities across Southwest and Central Mississippi, all three components facilitated life-style changes such as change in composition of participant’s home meals, increase in their daily physical activity, and establishment and engagement in community gardens.

The programs resulted in immediate success, enthusiastic participation and positive impacts. For example, one participant commented “My suits are now too big in the waist, and the jackets are kind of hanging off my shoulders.”

2015 Southern Region Middle Managers Officers

Chair: Jeff Young (University of Kentucky)

Vice-Chair: Sheri Schwab (North Carolina State University)

Secretary: Dee Cooper (Oklahoma State University)

Past Chair: Loni Johnson (Virginia Cooperative Extension)

Newsletter Editors: Eric Simonne and Julie Wilson (University of Florida)

KNOW YOUR MIDDLE MANAGER



Sharon Reynolds
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1-Where are you from/where did you grow up?

I was born in Pocahontas, Arkansas and grew up in Jonesboro, AR

(Northeast Arkansas) I have worked in the Oklahoma and Arkansas Extension systems.

2-How and when did you decide you wanted to be an Extension Middle Manager?

I did not know I wanted to be a middle manager until my former supervisor recruited me for the job. He trained and mentored me and taught me to appreciate this facet of Extension work.

3-What are your hobbies?

Bicycle riding and reading

4-Describe yourself in one word.

Persistent

5-Where did you go on your last vacation?

The gulf coast of Florida – Blue Mountain Beach

6-What was the last book you read?

Dallas 1963

7-What is the most memorable situation you had to deal with as a Middle Manager?

The most memorable situations as a middle manager, are hiring the best people whose skills and temperament are a good fit for an extension job and watching them succeed.

8-Do you play a musical instrument?

No

9-What is the most exciting place you have ever visited?

Italy

10-What gives you the most satisfaction in your job?

Watching employees grow and mature professionally.



Charles “Charlie” Vavrina

University of Florida

1-Where are you from/where did you grow up?

I am from northern new jersey; Tenafly, NJ a suburb of New York City.

2-How and when did you decide you wanted to be an Extension Middle Manager?

I did not decide to be a District Extension Director (DED). Rather, I was given the opportunity to become a DED in 2002 by a former Extension administrator in Florida because of my role in the initiation of (in 1998) and guidance to a regional advisory committee in South Florida called “the leadership in vegetables”. The L.E.I provided a forum for agents, Extension specialists, center directors, and vegetable growers to interact.

3-What are your hobbies?

Reading [does not include promotion packages (laughs...)], some golf, swimming, and civil war fan.

4-Describe yourself in one word.

Personable

5-Where did you go on your last vacation?

A civil war battle-site tour that included Sandestin, FL; New Orleans, LA; Biloxi, MS; and Vicksburg, MS.

6-What was the last book you read?

The Chickamauga Campaign, by David Powell

7-What is the most memorable situation you had to deal with as a Middle Manager?

The 2015 Gateway meeting (an assembly of county managers for open dialogue about all the goods and services the University of Florida has to offer to them, from within and outside of Extension).

8-Do you play a musical instrument?

Yes, the piano.

9-What is the most exciting place you have ever visited?
Athens, Greece and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

10-What gives you the most satisfaction in your job?
My professional inter-personal relationships with county faculty members.



HAPPY RETIREMENT CHARLIE!



Remember to participate in our MM
Conference Calls (10:00am EST/9:00am
Central) by dialing (712) 432-0931 and
enter participant code 911522# on:

Thursday February 11, 2016

Thursday April 14, 2016

Thursday June 9, 2016

Thursday July 14, 2016



CHECK IT OUT!

Stay connected and engaged with your peers in the southern region with the Middle Managers' page of the Southern Region Leadership network

The current page of the MM group is accessible at <http://srpln.msstate.edu/pln/mm.html> and is divided in four sections:

- 1-The 2015-2016 officers and their contact
- 2-MM information with membership list and current plan of work
- 3-MM update materials with recent state reports, wikis and links to parent institutions websites
- 4-MM links to the latest SR MM conference and your newsletter

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEETING

AUGUST 22-25, 2016

NASHVILLE, TN

SEE YOU THERE!



MIDDLE MANAGEMENT:
THE INTERMEDIATE
MANAGEMENT OF A
HIERARCHICAL
ORGANIZATION THAT IS
SUBORDINATE TO THE
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT
AND RESPONSIBLE FOR AT
LEAST TWO LOWER LEVELS
OF JUNIOR STAFF.

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