



FARM PEOPLE & PERFORMANCE

STRENGTHENING THE MIDDLE: A FARM LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Empowering Your Management Team:

How clear structures and leadership support protect performance and team well-being

A resource for growing farms to support the middle management layer through training, clear reporting, and professional structure.

What this resource gives you

A practical guide to improve structure, fairness, reporting, and team confidence.

Best used when

The business is feeling pressure, drift, mixed messages, or uncertainty about what is really happening on the ground.

The Problem

Growing farms often run smoothly until they reach a size where the owners can no longer oversee everything. At this stage, the business relies on supervisors, managers, and team leaders. However, many managers in agriculture were never trained to lead people; they were promoted because they were good operators.

As the business scales, this middle layer is asked to carry a massive load—hitting production targets, managing costs, keeping staff engaged, and absorbing pressure from above.

This guide is for the business where:

- Managers are feeling the strain of balancing owner expectations with the daily needs of the frontline team.
- Critical operational information is getting lost or delayed because reporting systems are informal or overwhelmed.
- Capable operators need additional tools and training to transition into confident, effective people leaders.

When leadership training is missing, the middle layer feels the pressure.

Even the best operators can struggle with communication and team engagement if they aren't given the right framework. This isn't a personality flaw; it's a structural gap that impacts the whole business.





The real operational challenge is identifying the structural support and training managers need to lead their teams to success.

The Solution

- 1. Watch the Reporting Chain**
- 2. Support the Middle Layer (and Ensure Accountability)**
- 3. Separate Performance from Personality**
- 4. Put in a Proper Review Process**
- 5. Stop Quiet Problems Before They Blow Up**

1. Streamline the reporting chain

When managers are overwhelmed or under stress, they can resort to 'copy and paste' reporting, which makes everything appear good on the surface, but can prevent critical information from reaching the top. We need systems that make it easy for truth to travel upward without creating extra stress and work for managers. When managers feel supported, they become champions of transparent communication.

Ask yourself:

- Does our reporting system clearly define what information needs to be shared?
- Are we providing enough time and technical support for accurate data collection?
- How can we make our communication lines more direct and accessible for everyone?

Ask your staff:

- Do you feel safe telling the truth about what is happening on the ground?
- Have you ever seen information softened before it was passed on?
- If something is not right, do you think it gets fixed or covered?

2. Support the middle level (and ensure accountability)

Great people management is a skill that must be learned. If we want managers to protect fairness and culture, we must invest in their growth as leaders. Leadership structure ensures that managers aren't left alone to figure it out, but are part of a supported, professional network.



Ask yourself:

- Are we providing leadership training that matches the scale of our production goals?
- Does our structure provide managers with clear guidance on handling team feedback?
- Does a manager have too much unchecked control over reviews, pay, rosters, and the story that reaches the owner?

Ask your staff:

- Do your managers listen?
- Do they act fairly?
- Do they treat feedback as useful, or as a threat?

3. Separate performance from personality

A business gets into trouble when criticism becomes personal and truth becomes dangerous. When pressure turns into frustration, it can lead to shortness and staff disengagement. Suddenly, the business thinks it has a people problem, but it actually has a structure and support problem.

Ask yourself:

- Are we reviewing actual behaviour, or just rewarding the people we like?
- Are we confusing loyalty with performance?
- Are staff avoiding honesty because they do not want conflict?

Ask your staff:

- Do you feel you can speak plainly?
- Have you ever been punished for raising a real issue?
- Do you think people get judged fairly in this business?

4. Put in a proper review process

Good reviews should not be one manager's opinion written down as fact. It must include a proper rhythm that gives workers a way to speak honestly and openly, and a way for managers to get support before they burn out or become the problem themselves.

A fair process should include:

- Clear criteria and regular timing.
- More than one point of view where needed.
- Evidence, not just opinion, with room for the employee to respond.



Ask yourself:

- Can we prove the review is fair, and is there a paper trail?
- Is the process the same for everyone?

Ask your staff:

- Do you understand how you are being assessed?
- Have you been given a fair chance to explain your side?
- Do you think the process is consistent?

5. Stop quiet problems before they blow up

Most serious blow-ups do not start with one big event. They start with minor deceptions, small silences, and small compromises. By the time poor leadership shows up as resignations, safety issues, or constant recruitment pressure, the issue has usually been building for a long time.

Ask yourself:

- What is being tolerated because it is inconvenient to fix?
- What are we not hearing because the middle layer is smoothing it over?
- What would we learn if staff could speak without consequences?

Ask your staff:

- What is the one thing you wish management would fix properly?
- What do people avoid saying here?
- If you could change one process, what would it be?

So, what does good look like?

A healthy growing farm business usually has:

- Clear org charts and reporting lines
- Honest reporting where truth travels upward
- Fair reviews and managers who are accountable
- A culture where staff feel safe raising issues
- Owners and boards who are not blindsided

Less guessing, less hidden pressure, and better retention.

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Ready for an honest check-up?

If the person in the middle is controlling the story, you need someone outside that chain to reset it. Want help with this process including full accountability of all parties and without the politics? That is where Drover Ag and the Farm People and Performance program come in...

Check out the free and confidential **Farm Team Health Check** that helps us identify your structural gaps. [DO THE QUIZ NOW](#)







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You and your people.

- ✓ Farm Team Health Check
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