

# Managing Our Farm Crew for Optimal Performance



Don Zasada, Caretaker Farm

# Caretaker Farm



- Williamstown, MA: We arrived in 2005
- 34 Acres Total, 6.5 in Veggies, Berries, Fruit and Flowers
- 275 Full Share Summer CSA, 125 Winter CSA, Shelter
- On Farm, Free Choice, 20 % U-Pick
- 1 Greenhouse, 4 Hoophouses, 2 Cat Tunnels
- 100 Chickens, 4 Pigs and a Homestead Bakery
- 7 Employees (Me, Wife, 18 year old Daughter, 15 Year old Son, Winter CSA Manager/3 days in Summer, 3 Full Season Apprentices, Baker-Ind Contractor
- 500 Adult Members volunteer 2 hours, some volunteer 10 hours, volunteer groups on farm ever week

“If you are constantly firing people (or they are resigning on bad terms); it’s a sign you’re:

- a. Bad at Hiring
- b. Bad at Managing People
- c. Bad at Tolerating Dissent
- d. All of the Above

How many people do you have to fire (or resign) before you realize that the common denominator in all of the failing hires is you?”

Adam Grant



- Hiring for Fit
- Orientation, Clear Expectations
- Infrastructure
- Organizational Structure/Roles
- Benefits(\$, Food/Treats, Time, Experiences)
- Rules
- Weekly/Daily Management
- Supporting Professional Development
- Expressing Care/Gratitude/Instruction
- Feedback (Daily, Monthly and Exit Interview)



# Why Monthly Check-ins?

1. Proactively address areas of conflict before they get too big
2. Employees are open to receiving feedback in a safe environment
3. Forces employer to look at the complete body of work of each employee without focusing on just the strengths or weaknesses
4. Suggestions arise that lead to direct positive change for the farm
5. Instant morale boost for everyone as all feel cared for, respected, and listened to
6. Most efficient use of all of my time during the course of the season



# Monthly Check-in Schedule

May	Me to team, Goal Setting
June	Me to each individual employee
July	Intensive Real Talk/360 feedback
August	Self Reflective & Review Goal Setting
September	Me to each individual employee
October	Intensive Real Talk/360 feedback



# Facilitating “Intensive Real Talk” (Adapted from Growing Together by Greg Gale)

- A week before we are going to have Real Talk, I explain the process and review ground rules.
- Give employees an hour of work time to write feedback for each member of the crew. We want 2-4 examples of positives and 2-4 examples of areas for improvement within the context of how you can do your work better together to fulfill the mission. “What could I do or stop doing that would make it easier to work with me.”
- Format of Intensive Real Talk
  - Meet 1 on 1 with each other
  - One person shares for 3.5 minutes and then the other person shares for 3.5 minutes. I will let everyone know when it is time to switch.
- When we have finished meeting with each other I facilitate a brief discussion on the experience.

# **Sharing Real Talk** (Adapted from Growing Together by Greg Gale)

**Be Kind** Only if you deliver your message with thoughtfulness, care and kindness can someone hear it.

**Call it as you see it** Think carefully and deeply about the other person. Identify things about them that you believe are strengths and areas for improvement

**Speak the Details** Situation, Behavior, Impact

**Balance the Scales** Find a way to acknowledge both

**Pick and Choose** Talk about only what is most essential: You have 3.5 minutes

**Read the Listener** Watch them carefully as you speak to see if they are still able to hear you. Make eye contact!

# **Receiving Real Talk** (Adapted from Growing Together by Greg Gale)

**Open Up** Notice if you begin shutting down. Try not to be defensive; it only distracts you and stops your learning.

**Look Up** Make eye contact, without it the speaker won't know if you are hearing the message.

**Listen Up** Listen with the intent to understand, not to reply. You have to stop the inner voice so that you can hear the other person's words.

**Store it Up** Pay attention and remember what is said.

**You Decide** You are the one who gets to decide what feedback you want to act on. Use Real Talk to strengthen who you already are.

# Time Required for Monthly Feed Back Sessions

**May, June, September** About 1 hour of thinking about what I want to say and how to say it and 1 hour (total) of meeting with everyone.

**August** No time required to prep and 1 1/2 hours to meet with everyone

**July and October** 30 minutes to explain this form of feedback and frame the conversation by providing ground rules a week before we are doing this check-in. 1 hour of work time for everyone to write down feedback. On the check-in day, we need 1 1/2 hours to again go over the ground rules, actually do the feedback and then allow everyone to share about the experience.

Total Time = 13.5 Hours (Less than 2 hours per month for our 7 month season).



# A Few Resources

Growing Together by Greg Gale

The Slight Edge by Jeff Olson

Radical Candor by Kim Scott  
(Also a podcast)

Atomic Habits by James Clear

A Lot of Podcasts that overlap  
with Mgmt/Personal Development

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