



Juggling the Program Management Ball

Note: *In response to the substantial turnover of middle managers in Cooperative Extension, the following training module for new middle managers has been prepared by a joint task force of the Program and Staff Development and the Middle Management Committees of the Southern Region Program Leadership Network. The target audience for this module is broadly defined as middle managers. The terminology varies by institution, but middle management is meant to include such positions as district directors, regional directors, and county directors. (They may also be referred to as chairs or coordinators). Because of the uniqueness of each position and the policies and procedures of each state and institution, these modules should serve as a general framework and will need to be supplemented with more specific support materials. If you wish to contact the authors of this module, their contact information can be found at the end of the module.*

Objectives:

- Participants will have a clear understanding of the middle manager's role in providing leadership in all Extension program areas in their county or district
- Participants will demonstrate knowledge of the components of a solid extension program
- Participants will identify 5 things they must know in order to effectively lead all of the programs in their county or district and strategies for learning about each
- Participants will demonstrate a working knowledge of the major Extension program areas

Advance Preparation:

- Secure materials
- Make copies of handouts
- Using 5 different colored dots or stickers, place a colored dot or sticker on each person's nametag or materials to delineate group members for the brainstorming activity.
- Prepare 5 sheets of flip chart paper, one with each of these titles on it for the brainstorming activity: *Know your County (or District), Know the Stakeholders, Know Stakeholder Needs, Know your Extension Educators, Know your Educators' Programs*. Place the 5 sheets on the wall around the room.
- Tailor the slide set to better fit your state or institution needs. You may want to insert a slide on the programming model you are using in place of the logic model slide used in the

original presentation. The slides can also be altered to target either county directors or district directors.

Materials Needed:

- Sticky back flip chart paper and dark markers
- Stickers or colored dots
- Computer, presentation projector, blank wall or screen
- Blank index cards for final activity
- Handouts:
 - State specific program development model or LOGIC model
 - “If I knew then what I know now” worksheet
 - Copy of presentation in handout format with space for taking notes

Time Needed: 2 hours

Additional Notes:

- Some activities within this module may be difficult to do with more than 30 individuals at one time.
- The activities can be easily adjusted to use with both aspiring & current county directors **and district directors.**

BACKGROUND

One of the biggest challenges for Extension administrators at the district and county levels is to develop the skills necessary to effectively lead all of the Extension programs within their purview. Having a working knowledge of the major Extension programs in the county and/or district is essential to successful performance of job responsibilities. Conducting productive performance reviews, providing essential program support, budget procurement, program evaluation and job satisfaction can hinge on how knowledgeable the administrator is in each major Extension program area. Without this knowledge, being a successful leader is next to impossible.

What makes developing the necessary skills so difficult is the fact that, typically, county and district administrators may have training and experience in only one particular program area of Extension (Agriculture, Family & Consumer Science, 4-H Youth Development, Rural/Community

Development and others) in their positions prior to becoming unit administrators. This, combined with the diversity of Extension programming in any given geographic area, contributes to the challenge of learning to lead all program areas within Extension.

Developing the skills to provide leadership in all program areas requires the acquisition of certain competencies. County and district administrators must understand the stakeholders and audiences for each program area of responsibility. They must also know the staff and the abilities and expertise of each. To be effective, administrators must gain the trust and respect of staff in each program area while encouraging teamwork within and among program areas. As Extension transitions into new program areas such as community leadership development, community issues forums and others, the task of developing the competencies to understand all of the Extension program areas becomes even more challenging.

This module provides training in developing the necessary competencies for success in leading all of the Extension programs. As you work through the module, please keep in mind the objectives of learning to lead the **entire** Extension program— *that means being proficient in providing guidance and supervision in all Extension program areas.*

INTEREST APPROACH

(15 minutes)

(Note: Show Slides 1 and 2 first to introduce session. This activity is on Slide 3.)

- **Activity: *If I knew then what I know now!***

- **Do:**

Distribute *If I knew then what I know now!* worksheets

- **Say:**

“Think back to your first few weeks or months on the job as a new county or district director. List 3 things you wish you had known then that would have made your job of leading all of the Extension program areas much easier. Take about 3 minutes and jot those down.” (NOTE: If you have aspiring county or district directors in the group, ask them to jot down 3 things they wish they knew about county or district programs that they think would make the job easier in providing guidance in all program areas.)

(After 3 minutes) “Find a partner. Now I want you to take turns sharing your list with a colleague. Talk about the challenges you face or faced with not knowing these things and how you eventually learned about them. After one of you has shared, switch roles. You will have about 8 minutes to do this. At the end of that time, I’ll ask some of you to volunteer to share a little about your discussion.”

- **Do:**
 - Allow about 5 minutes for sharing some key points of discussion with the large group. You may want to jot down some of the things they wish they had known on a flip chart so you can refer to them later if they are not included in the rest of this lesson.

LESSON

- Distribute copies of presentation handout on *“Leading the Total Extension Program: Juggling the Program Management Ball”*.
- Introduce lesson & begin instruction **(Slides 1-13)**
 - Introduction **(Slides 1 & 2)**
 - Interest Approach Activity *(If I knew then what I know now)*(15 minutes) **(Slide 3)**
 - Lesson objectives **(Slide 4)**
 - Role of county director or district director in programming **(Slide 5)**
 - Program development basics **(Slides 6-13)**
- **Brainstorming Activity: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but a lot of knowledge is a powerful thing!**(45 minutes)(Slide 14)

- **SAY:**

“Effectively leading all of the program areas in your county or district is a complicated process which involves many things. And not having a good handle on those things can present challenges to a middle manager, probably the most significant of which may be the loss of funding for an extension program that is not meeting the needs of stakeholders. Five keys to effectively providing leadership to all of the Extension programs in your area appear to be: Knowing your county or counties, knowing the stakeholders, knowing the needs of the stakeholders, knowing your extension educators and knowing their programs. I have posted flip chart paper around the room with each of those five topics on it. Your challenge is to identify as many strategies as you can for learning about each of those keys.

This is the process we will use. You will break up into 5 groups by the color of dot (or type of sticker) on your nametag (or materials). Each group will begin at a different point and you will have 5 minutes to list as many strategies as you can think of for addressing that key on the flip chart. When the time is up, I’ll give you the next set of instructions.”

- **DO:**
Send each group to a different flip chart and monitor time. After 5 minutes, give the next set of instructions.
- **SAY:**
“Now rotate clockwise. Read what the previous group wrote and add your own ideas to it. You will have 5 minutes for this part assignment.”
- **DO:**
Monitor time. With each rotation, the process becomes somewhat more challenging because all of the obvious ideas are up. Encourage participants to think creatively. Move from group to group to listen to the discussion and encourage groups to build on the ideas of others and stretch their thinking. After 5 minutes, give instructions to rotate again. Continue rotation until all 5 groups have added their thoughts to each flip chart. Watch groups to see if they need additional flip chart paper. If it appears people are not engaged in the process or finish the task early, you may want to shorten the time. In the final rotation, each group should end up where they began.
- **SAY:**
“Now you should be back where you started. Your job now is to summarize the points written on the flipchart and select a reporter to give an oral report to the large group. You will have about 5 minutes to synthesize the information and you will be asked to briefly report back later during this session.”
- **DO:**
Monitor time and then return to slides and remind the group that they will be asked to report back in a few minutes.
- 5 Key Things to Know--Work through slides (**Slides 15-23**) using speaker notes accompanying slides.
- Summarize session (**Slide 24**)
- **Conduct Final Activity:** Allow approximately 15 minutes for this activity. Participants use a business card or index card and write on the back the three things they will do to improve how they provide leadership to extension programs. Encourage them to be very specific in their commitments such as attend the FCS advisory council meeting next week. If they are using index cards, have them write their name, county or district, email address and phone number on the card. Once they have completed their list, then they select a partner. This person will be their accountability partner. They will spend 3 minutes sharing with their partner why they feel the need to work on this area and what they plan to do. The partner

provides about 3 minutes of feedback suggesting other things they might do improve in this area. After they receive feedback they will switch roles and they will repeat the process with the other partner sharing what they wrote and why for minutes, then they will receive feedback. They will swap cards and each will commit to check in with the other on a monthly basis for the next 3 months to see what progress they are making toward their goals and to give specific examples of what they have done.

APPLICATION

- Interview your county educators to learn more about them and their programs. Discuss with them how their plans of work reflect the needs identified by stakeholders and their plans to evaluate the program effectiveness.
- Visit with state specialists to learn more about statewide efforts in key program areas.
- Review statistics and data about stakeholders in your county or counties who have an interest in program areas in which you were not trained. For example, if you are knowledgeable about agriculture and natural resources, learn about single parent families, the poverty rate, the percentage of low birth weight babies, the school drop-out rate, the incidence of teen suicide and drug use, teen pregnancies, etc. If you are knowledgeable about families and youth, you will want to learn about the major commodities in your county or counties, number of acres of land in agricultural production, the average farm income, the number of farmers, etc. If you have worked in 4-H, you will want to learn about issues faced by families and about agriculture.
- Participate in at least one advisory council meeting for each main program area in your county or counties to learn more about the needs of stakeholders and how the local extension program is or is not meeting those needs.
- Whenever possible, visit with stakeholders in program areas other than your own to learn more about them.
- Conduct a client satisfaction survey or conduct a series of interviews or focus groups to discover how well the extension program is meeting the needs of the stakeholders in the county or counties. Then make adjustments to the program as indicated. All county educators should be involved in this process, not just the county director.
- Get involved in civic groups in your county and/or district.

REFERENCES

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