



# Leading the Total Extension Program – Series Overview

**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 identify personal attributes required to be an effective middle manager, assess themselves on those personal attributes and identify the three they are best at and the three they most need to work on.
- Participants will identify 7 competencies required to provide effective leadership to the overall Extension program at the county or district level and multiple ways to achieve mastery in each.
- Participants will identify key personal attributes necessary to be successful in leading an extension program.

## **Advance Preparation:**

- Determine if you will use your own institution's competency list for middle managers or the one included in this lesson. Make adjustments to the competency checklist and other materials to fit your needs. Include hyperlinks within the document to institution-specific information.
- Make copies of handouts.
- You may want to arrange for middle managers who have mastered certain competencies to share some of their personal experiences with the group.

**Materials Needed:**

- One copy of Handout *“Do you have what it takes...”* per participant
- One copy of Handout *“Leading the Total Extension Program Core Competency Checklist for Extension Middle Managers”* per participant
- One copy of Worksheet *“Best Practices for Extension Middle Managers”* per participant
- Power Point Presentation and Speaker Notes for *“Leading the Total Extension Program”*
- Computer, presentation projector, blank wall or screen
- One copy of presentation in handouts format per participant
- Blank index cards for Application activities

**Time Needed:** 1 ½ hours (you can expand this version by having speakers to come in to address each of the 7 competencies in more detail and expand this to a day-long training or a 7-session series. One successful approach has been to get Middle Managers who have mastered individual competencies to come in and share their experiences).

**BACKGROUND**

The job of a middle manager, either a county director or a district director, in the extension system is a critical one. It’s multi-faceted nature also makes it a very challenging one at times. In general, the extension middle manager is charged with providing visionary and innovative leadership, direction, guidance, supervision, management, and administration of Extension programs and personnel. Although specific middle manager tasks may vary widely from state to state, some common responsibilities include providing in-service training opportunities to extension program faculty, administering programs and activities of the county or district, coordinating staffing and serving as a liaison with government officials relative to personnel, finance, and operation of county extension programs, and implementing the EEO and Affirmative Action programs. Another important function of the middle manager is the enforcement of all personnel and fiscal policies of the extension system.

It is not uncommon for extension middle managers to have limited or no experience in an administrative role prior to accepting the position of middle manager. That puts some middle managers on a pretty steep learning curve to get prepared to be effective in their new jobs. This module was developed in an attempt to provide a basic understanding of the expectations of middle managers. Many institutions have developed their own set of competencies for middle managers and these should be considered when planning to present this module. To the extent possible, institution-specific competencies and examples should be used.

## INTEREST APPROACH

### DO:

Distribute *Do you have what it takes...to be a successful extension middle manager?* handout

### SAY:

*“Effectively leading an extension program requires a certain set of personal attributes. If we are honest, some of us have them and some of us don’t and that can vary from day to day and from situation to situation. The good news is that if we don’t have them and know that we don’t, we can begin working on them. To determine if you’ve got what it takes, let’s take a closer look at ourselves. Be honest as you rate yourself on each of these attributes and consider not only how you see yourself but also how others, primarily the extension personnel you supervise, would rate you. When you have finished scoring yourself, determine which three you do best and which three you most need to work on and record them at the bottom of the sheet.”*

### DO:

Monitor work on self-assessment. When it appears everyone has finished give the next set of instructions. Typically 3-5 minutes will be long enough for everyone to complete the first part.

### SAY:

*“Now select a partner and share with that person the three attributes you most need to work on. Site specific examples to explain what made you say that. Ask your partner to give you suggestions of what you might try to improve your skill in that attribute. After about 5 minutes, I’ll have you switch and let the other partner share.”*

### Do:

Walk around the room and listen in on some of the conversations. At the end of 5 minutes, have partners switch roles with one another.

## LESSON

- Distribute copies of presentation, *“Best Practices Worksheet”* and *“Leading the Total Extension Program Core Competency Checklist for Extension Middle Managers”*.
- Work through PPT presentation--*“Leading the Total Extension Program”* with Application activities regarding best practices imbedded in presentation.
- Conduct *Final Activity* from **Application** section below. Allow approximately 15 minutes for this activity.

## APPLICATION

- Opportunities for application and sharing best practices regarding competencies are built in throughout the lesson and are indicated in speaker notes.
- *Final activity:* Participants take out a business card and write on the back the three things they think they most need to work on to improve upon leading their extension program. Then they select a partner. This person will be their accountability partner. They will spend 3 minutes sharing with their partner why they wrote what they did on the back of their card and the partner will provide about 3 minutes of feedback. At the end of the 6 minutes they will switch roles and they will repeat the process with the other partner sharing what they wrote and why for 3 minutes, then they will receive feedback. Each will commit to check in with the other on a monthly basis to see what progress they are making toward improving in the identified areas and to give specific examples of what they have done.

## REFERENCES

Davis, Debra T. (2009). Based on the LSU AgCenter's Competency Model for Parish Chairs. For information, contact [ddavis@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:ddavis@agcenter.lsu.edu).

### ***Developed by:***

*Debra T. Davis, Ph.D.; Professor and Interim Director, Organization Development & Evaluation, [ddavis@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:ddavis@agcenter.lsu.edu)*