

CITRUS HARVESTING IS NOT JUST PICKING ORANGES

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By Gordon Smith

It would seem the principles of citrus harvesting would be elementary. In reality, however, harvesting is fraught with myriad details, including personalities, equipment and regulations.

Thus it was that when a large group of growers and harvesters attended a citrus harvesting management seminar, the entire first morning of the two-day meeting dealt with the human side of management.

Bill Brown, Ph.D., a management consultant and former professor at Rollins College, told the audience things that would seem like common knowledge, but which apparently are not always practiced.

Citrus harvesters are usually minority workers. According to Brown, they are very bright, and street smart with a keen people-sense. They are outgoing, kind and generous. Most are respectful of authority and resent "superior" attitudes. They have unrealistic attitudes on absenteeism and want to be listened to. Unfortunately, many are unaware of business costs and have the attitude that the grower is making millions of dollars.

Brown said these people will usually leave quietly rather than argue or complain. They prefer specific guidelines, directions and standards. Most will not respond to threats and abusive language and are extremely sensitive to non-verbal communications. A hurt to an individual, Brown said, is punishment to the entire group.

A highly important part of management is communications. This can be manifested both vocally and in "body english," Brown said. People with language differences are "face watchers," he said. Poor eye contact, frowns, "mad" looks can be turn-offs. Managers must be made more aware of ethnic differences in culture and background. Each group must be dealt with differently, and when certain groups are yelled at, they harbor

resentments and almost never forgive.

Other factors influencing good relations are listening, recognizing and praising good performance, and avoiding favoritism.

Brown said there are 17 characteristics of good leadership: 1. Be appreciative of people; 2. Always be courteous and respectful; 3. Be easy to talk to; 4. Make workers feel part of a team; 5. Be interested in ideas and opinions; 6. Correct those who

the ladder into the tree tops.

DeLeon's crews use fork lifts to the groves and the biggest cause of ladder damage is being run over by a fork lift.

Pickers in Florida can make more dollars in five hours than California pickers do in eight hours, according to DeLeon.

Jerry Brewer of Latt Maxcy Harvesting, Inc., said the goals of a harvesting manager should include r

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need it tactfully and privately; 7. Help people learn and grow; 8. Always look for newer, easier, better ways; 9. Give frequent praise and recognition; 10. Be well organized; 11. Take time to know people; 12. Make workers feel important; 13. Be in work area without interfering, but be aware of what is going on; 14. Show trust and confidence in abilities of people; 15. Get things done; 16. Always have a positive outlook; 17. Be a great listener.

Ralph DeLeon is president of Samco, Inc., a harvesting company that has picking crews in both California and Florida. He explained that pickers in California use clippers when harvesting both fresh and process fruit. Each picker is given metal sizing rings, and they must replace them if the rings are lost. Three different bag sizes are also available.

Samco uses specially designed aluminum ladders. They are less expensive than wood ladders when the life of the ladder is considered, DeLeon said. They last for 10-20 years and the company does its own ladder maintenance. They are tapered, which makes it easier to place

duction of cost to the grower. The goals should also include training and education for the pickers and production of a quality product. Managers should also promote grower relations and should be dedicated to the job. He said his company implemented a training program three years ago which includes having picking crews tour processing plants and fresh fruit packinghouses so they can see what happens to the fruit once it leaves the grove.

Pickers can also sign up to ride with a supervisor for a day. This gives them a better understanding of the entire operation. Brewer said there was little response to this program during the first year, but there are now too many pickers wanting to participate.

Other options

There was a discussion of whether pickers are paid by the box. It is probably because it has always been done that way. A suggestion was made that pickers might be paid by the tree rather than the box.

Leafus Tarver is a harvesting cor

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