

PROFESSIONALISM

The image you project and the success of your program will depend, in part, on your own commitment to professionalism and personal development. As a role model for students, you need to “walk the talk”—to practice the same high standards of ethics, professionalism, goal setting, leadership and coping skills you expect from students.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. Plan ways you will establish a reputation for strong image and ethics. Make these practices an integral part of everything you do.
2. Recognize and prepare for your role as leader.
3. Commit to professionalism by striving for the standards outlined in the Teacher’s Creed of the National Association of Agricultural Educators.
4. Set professional goals, develop detailed plans for their attainment and work your plan.
5. Implement strategies for coping with stress.

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AG TEACHER'S CREED

I am an agricultural educator by choice and not by chance.

I believe in American agriculture; I dedicate my life to its development and the advancement of its people.

I will strive to set before my students by my deeds and actions the highest standards of citizenship for the community, state and nation.

I will endeavor to develop professionally through study, travel and exploration.

I will not knowingly wrong my fellow teachers. I will defend them as far as honesty will permit.

I will work for the advancement of agricultural education and I will defend it in my community, state and nation.

I realize that I am a part of the school system. I will work in harmony with school authorities and other teachers of the school.

My love for youth will spur me on to impart something from my life that will help make for each of my students a full and happy future.

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STEPS FOR SETTING PROFESSIONAL GOALS

- 1. Identify your professional goals.** These can be in reference to classroom management, scores on evaluations, degrees or certifications you will achieve, program growth, or any other metric that is important to you professionally.
- 2. List the benefits** you will realize by reaching the goal.
- 3. List any additional skills you will need to have, or other things that have to be in place before you can reach each goal.**
- 4. Categorize your goal by when you will achieve it.** A good general way to do this is by asking yourself, "Will I achieve this goal

in the next 6 months?
 in the next year?
 in the next 5 years?
 in the next 10 years?

You do not have to stick with this grouping - use a time frame that makes sense for you.

- 5. Develop a detailed plan of action** for each goal. Be specific! For instance, if it is your goal to grow your Alumni group by 10 members in the next 6 months, you might need to:
 - ask your current Alumni leaders to identify potential members or brainstorm at a meeting.
 - Network at community functions or with other community organizations to invite new members.
 - Design a banner or sign to put up outside your building, encouraging people to join.
- 6. Put dates in your calendar** for when you will work on this goal. Make the appointments as

specific as possible. Back to the Alumni example; perhaps you will set aside 3:30-4:30 p.m. a couple of times each month to call potential members.

- 7. Identify a reward for accomplishment.** Make it something exciting that you'll look forward to. Celebrating your accomplishments is important.

Make your goals SMART!

SMART goals are detailed goals that have several key parts to make them easier to carry out. SMART goals are:

- S - specific
- M - measurable
- A - achievable
- R - relevant
- T - time-based

Example of a goal without using a SMART objective:

- Participate in several FFA events this year.

SMART Example:

- Within this school year, participate in at least 4 CDE or LDE area events with at least 4 students participating in each event.

ETHICS AND PUBLIC IMAGE

Among the many factors that contribute to the survival of a beginning teacher, ethics and public image are among the top contenders. The topics cannot be separated, since they are so closely related. Volumes could be written and several courses taught on these topics. You will need to “flesh out” the limited tips here to fit your personality and community needs.

Begin by taking a careful look at the community in which you teach. Pay close attention to the nature and background of the people you will serve. You are the professional, but community members pay the salaries and thus deserve consideration.

ETHICS

True or False: “In this age of moral turmoil, what is right and wrong is viewed as a conditional issue that can be skewed to fit each individual’s wants and wishes, as long as it can be properly rationalized.” That may have been “true” at the college you attended or even your home community. The reality in the community where you teach is likely to be quite different.

Most communities where agriculture is taught are conservative and reflect a legacy of strong ethics and values. Therefore, you will always do better to act and live in ways that fit those standards. This is not to say you should adopt specific political or religious doctrines, but you will do well to respect and uphold the community’s overall attitudes in such matters.

In addition, clear professional and personal ethics will earn you respect, career success and personal fulfillment. Here are some basic tips for upholding ethical standards.

- **Never violate the integrity of a student.**
When a student is embarrassed by the teacher, that teacher must be prepared to expect and accept repercussions. After all, every person is an individual and must be treated with respect. Otherwise, students will fight back to preserve their self-worth.
- **Always speak positively about colleagues.**
Students pick up on nonprofessional behavior and take it back to the staff person in question. They may even turn it on you if it is in their best interest to do so.
- **Avoid the use of inappropriate language.**
If you cannot find enough descriptive adjectives with which to communicate, you cannot expect a student to do so.
- **Realize personal habits are often emulated by students.**
After all, “If Ms./Mr. Adams does it, it must be okay for me too.” Expect students to behave in ways similar to the example you set.
- **Hold to high moral standards.**
If parents find out a teacher has loose moral standards (with regards to sexual conduct, alcohol abuse, illicit drugs, criminal activity, etc.), they will undoubtedly pull their children from that teacher’s classes. You may never find out the reason—it will just happen.

- **Stand firm on convictions as to what is right and wrong.**

You will earn more respect from students and parents when you do not waver concerning absolutes in your life. Hold fast to a single standard. Inconsistency, when spotted, erodes others' perceptions of your dependability. Students recognize inconsistency quickly and will often risk negative behavior.

- Avoid being alone with a student. Being alone with a student can be detrimental to your career. It is a best practice to make sure that you are not alone with a student and that doors or rooms are left open. For serious discussions, consider having another teacher or adult who can serve as a witness to the discussion.
- Maintain your professional image in person as well as on social media.

PUBLIC IMAGE

Strong ethics are the start of establishing a positive public image for yourself and your program. Here are some tips to maintaining a professional public image. For specific suggestions about marketing your program, please see [Section 16](#).

- **Make some quality friends in the community.**

Get to know people in the community. Find friends who are not only compatible to you but will be a source of strength and help in times of need. On the converse, you can be there for them when you are needed.

- **Develop an advisory committee.**

It is absolutely imperative that you form an advisory committee. A good advisory committee provides solid guidance and direction for you and your program. ([See Section 14, Developing and Managing an Advisory Committee.](#))

- **Respond in a caring manner when there is a serious illness, death, or other tragedy in the community.**

It is amazing what a visit to the hospital or home or some similar outreach accomplishes. When you act from the heart, people respond in a host of positive ways.

- **Locate a good agriculture organization and become a part of it.**

When community members observe you in a supportive role, they realize you care about them and their livelihood.

- **Become involved in other community groups or organizations.**

Examples include a church, service clubs, sports leagues, etc. Other members of these groups can offer perspective and support.

- **“Blow your own horn,” even if it makes you uncomfortable.**

It is not normally the nature of service-oriented teachers to tell their own story, but it must be done. Community members will never know what is happening in your program if nothing is reported. If it is impossible for you to tell the story to the media, do it through a parent or chapter reporter. Social media is also something that you will want to utilize and is necessary for reaching other parents and students.

- **Be an advocate for agriculture.**

In your schools, your communities and online, there is a need for individuals who can tell agriculture's story effectively. Make this a part of your professional image. Learning how to respond professionally and calmly to those who disagree with you is an important part of advocacy. Attacking those with a different background or opinion will be unlikely to win others over to your side. Working on your own public speaking and professional relations skills allow you to be an advocate and a leader for the agriculture industry.

TEACHING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

While social media has many advantages, such as the ability for teachers to ask for help or share resources instantly, it can also allow videos, screenshots or comments to be shared in ways that may harm your image. Social media often requires teachers to maintain a professional image at all times, even on their personal accounts. There have been numerous stories of social media comments, images, or relationships that have caused teachers to lose their teaching positions or advisor responsibilities.

TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMAIL USE

- Consider maintaining personal social media pages that are separate from your social media presence as a teacher. It is usually best to keep your personal social media accounts private and not searchable by your students.
- Use apps or programs that allow you to send announcements without giving out your personal phone number. Examples include GroupMe or Remind.
- Talk with your school about its social media policies. Some may not allow you to have social media pages for your programs.
- Do not friend your students on your personal social media accounts. Allow them to contact you through your chapter social media pages or other apps.
- Document any negative social media or email interactions with parents, community members, etc. just like you would if it happened in person.
- Tone on social media and through email is very hard to convey. Many negative interactions have occurred because of a misunderstanding of tone. Really consider how your words could be taken by others before you post or email, even when using your personal pages.
- When you are angry, do not send social media messages or emails. Consider waiting 24 hours before you post or send the message.

YOU AS A LEADER

Agriculture instructors often find themselves in leadership roles, not only in their classrooms but with colleagues and other adults in school, community and professional organization settings.

A “facilitator” leadership style works well with students and adults and produces desirable results in terms of both activities completed and goodwill generated. It also provides the instructor with an opportunity to model a leadership style used by effective managers in a variety of work settings.

As leader/facilitator, you provide a group with the training, information, equipment and materials it needs to act. Your goal is to empower group members to work together to find their own solutions and manage their own efforts.

To empower the groups you lead

- share information with group members;
- help members attain the knowledge and skills they need;
- seek, find, and create the resources members need;
- build member confidence;
- help remove barriers that prohibit or limit the release of individual member energy and talent;
- resolve conflicts that paralyze group action;
- provide organizational arrangements appropriate to group effort;
- share power by giving initiative and responsibility to members.

DELEGATION

There are many reasons leaders fail to delegate, including fear, distrust, lack of confidence, time and planning. Nonetheless, delegation is an important means to achieve goals, strengthen an organization and build additional leaders.

Here are five essential areas to cover when delegating a task.

- **Task:** What do you expect the delegated person or group to do?
- **Reasons:** Why does the task need to be accomplished? Why should the person or group complete this task?
- **Players:** Who is involved in this task? Why is each involved?
- **Standards of performance:** What are specific expectations? At what quality and quantity do you expect the task to be completed? What type of feedback do you expect? By what time do you expect things to be completed?
- **Authority given:** What decisions are the delegated person or group allowed to make? Within what set of limitations must decisions be made?

Sources: National FFA Organization. (1991). BOAction Leaders Facilitators' and Staff Member Guide.

Manz, C. C., & Sims, H. P. (1995). Business Without Bosses: How Self-Managing Teams Are Building High-Performing Companies. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

COPING WITH STRESS

Stress is an inevitable part of any new job and a fairly constant companion for teachers. Check off the strategies below that you will use to cope with day-to-day stress.

CONTROL THE SITUATION.

- Avoid unrealistic deadlines.
- Do your best, but know your limits.
- Realize you cannot be everything to everyone.
- Learn to identify and limit your exposure to stressful situations and people. Recognize when to walk away from a stressful situation rather than fight a losing battle.

OPEN UP TO OTHERS.

- When faced with a tough situation, smile! A sincere smile often can defuse emotion and build a bridge of goodwill.
- Discuss your problems, frustrations and sources of uptightness with those who care about you.
- Start a peer teacher support group, professional learning community, or community of practice to share frustrations and solutions with others in similar situations.
- Ask for help from others who help your chapter regularly

■ PACE YOURSELF.

- Plan your day on a flexible basis.
- Do not try to do two or more things at the same time.
- Remember—haste makes waste! Counter unproductive haste by forcing yourself to slow down. Stop and smell the roses.
- Think before reacting.

- Live on a day-to-day basis rather than on a minute-by-minute basis.

EXERCISE AND RELAX.

- Engage in regular physical activity.
- When feeling uptight, relax for a few minutes by following these simple steps
 - sit comfortably with eyes closed in a quiet location;
 - slowly repeat a peaceful word or phrase over and over to yourself in your mind;
 - avoid distracting thoughts by keeping a passive mental attitude.

Source: Kreitner, R., & Cassidy, C. (2012). Management (12th ed.). Boston, MA. Cengage Learning.

Remember that stress is normal. However, if you find that the level of stress that you are under is causing you to lose interest in other aspects of your life or your career, it might be time to make some changes. Here are some ideas that may help you recharge.

■ Ask for help.

We always talk about how important community support is to your programs. Why not get community support and assistance at the same time? Do you have people in your community who could help with CDE or LDE trainings? Do you have someone who would love nothing more than to help with a judging team? What about a local gardener who is retired and would like to help with horticulture contests? Also, try to reach out to your local extension agent and see if you can train each other students to give each of you a break on certain CDEs. You do not have to do it alone!

COPING WITH STRESS

- **Evaluate why you are doing certain activities.**
Are you doing it because a few students want it, or because it is good for your community? Sometimes we participate in events because one or two students want to when instead we should focus on events with lots of support or a connection to industry in our area.
- **Make it ok to say “no” or at least “maybe later.”**
- **Lean on your Alumni and Supporters chapter and Advisory Groups to take the lead on events.**
- **Plan for “me time.”**
Intentionally plan time for you to relax with friends or participate in a hobby outside of school. Plan at least one day a month when no events get scheduled so you do something for you.
- **Ask for resources from other teachers.**
Teachers are more than happy to share what they have, but you have to ask for resources.