

TRAINING MIDDLE-LEVEL MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL FOR NURSERY OPERATIONS

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The Bushnell, Florida division of Flowerwood Nurseries, Inc. was established in January, 1985. Bushnell is located 50 miles north of Tampa and 50 miles west of Orlando. This location is in zone 9a of the new USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. The nursery presently covers 65 acres with 40 acres in plant production, and it employs 35 to 40 people.

In the beginning, labor and management needs could be handled by relatively few people. However, as the nursery grew, the need for middle level managers and supervisors arose. Because of the quality of employees already on the nursery, we felt our need could be met through promotion and training from within rather than by hiring outside our employee pool. When considering possible choices, a candidate's job performance, honesty, and level of interest in the nursery in general are of primary importance. Basic plant and nursery skills can be taught later, while the desire to learn and willingness to perform cannot. The ability to complete assigned tasks without repeatedly having to question procedure is a good indicator of supervisory ability and signals confidence. This confidence in one's own decisions and ability is essential for a supervisor.

The ability to get along with co-workers is another important consideration while selecting a supervisor. A positive working relationship with other employees leads to cooperation and good job performance.

Finally, punctuality and attendance are important. Some employees that are hard-working when at the nursery seem to always have pressing matters that keep them away from the workplace, while others can be depended upon day after day. The supervisor needs to set the example for others to follow.

Once you have selected your supervisor trainee, the training begins. A good supervisor needs "hands-on" experience in all areas of the day-to-day nursery operation. Before instructing and directing others, a supervisor first must have performed the task. Explain methods, time required, and possible shortcuts while stressing the desired final results. Never make your new supervisor guess your thoughts. When the supervisor gains confidence in his/her own ability, it will be easier to instruct others. Give your new supervisor only a few jobs and people to work with at first.

Too many responsibilities at first makes it difficult to master any one particular task. Again, always stress the desired results. When the supervisor becomes comfortable, gradually increase responsibilities. As proficiency and confidence grow, give your supervisor freedom to make decisions. Watch progress closely and do not let little mistakes become large due to the supervisor's inexperience. Be available to answer questions, but allow the supervisor to learn from experience. Let your supervisor direct the performance of the nursery employees. It is a gradual process, but eventually they will look to the supervisor to answer their questions while at the same time respecting his/her position of authority.

Early morning meetings are a good opportunity to discuss the day's goals without the normal working hour interruptions. Use this time to point out privately weaknesses and concrete methods to correct them. Be sure to give praise when deserved. Stress the high-priority matters and discuss how they should be handled.

A weekly written plan outlining the desired accomplishments is helpful in giving the supervisor a long-term idea of your plans. Use some method to emphasize the high priority items on your plan, then permit the supervisor to carry out the plan. This will allow the day-to-day nursery operation to revolve around the new supervisor, freeing you to concentrate on other matters.

Finally, once the supervisor has learned your way of doing things, give freedom to add a personal touch to the nursery operation.