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Management Resolutions for the New Year

It did not take long to identify an article topic for the third day of 2026: New Year's resolutions for your business. Instead of personal resolutions, I want you to think about your business. How did 2025 end? How do you want 2026 to begin? Consider the following 10 traits to adopt as resolutions. Your business will improve by simply embracing a change to your, your farming partners, and your employees' mindset. I've heard Dr. Steve Isaacs, Extension Farm Management specialist at UK, present on these topics many times through the years. It always helps to be reminded to stop and evaluate how you can become a better manager.

Dr. Isaacs states that the ten traits he has observed in all successful farm managers are that they are goal-driven, they seek and apply data, they are leaders, they are networked, they are dissatisfied, they are organizers, they are risk takers, they are smart, they work hard, and they take time to recharge.

Goal-driven managers should have a written mission statement for the business, including a definition of their business, family, and organization, which describes what it is, what its values are, and what is trying to be accomplished. The mission statement should include a vision for the future and should be the basis for strategic planning. To fulfill the mission statement, goals

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are required as objectives to accomplish, which can be measured. They must be “smart” goals.

Specific in that they explain exactly what they want to do. Measurable so that benchmarks can be achieved. Attainable because an impossible goal contributes nothing to the business.

Relevant so that it applies to the mission statement. Timed so that there is an ending for the goal.

Good managers are data-driven. They intend to know their cost of production. They like to establish and achieve benchmarks. They understand the value data provides to their business and are willing to share it with peers. General examples include farms that conduct variety demonstration plots, measure yield contest entries, or provide records to the Ohio Valley Farm Business Management Association. Good managers use data to make the most informed decisions.

Good managers are leaders in their business and their community. They develop communication channels within the business, among family, employees, and business partners. They coach, not boss. Good managers delegate, encourage, share credit, and serve. Good managers have character and integrity. They trust, are consistent in demeanor, are sincere, confident, and have vision and passion for their work.

Good managers are networked among peers. They realize their lack of ability and surround themselves with talent to fill the voids. Many have mentors to call on and often unknowingly serve mentees who recognize their talents and strive to replicate in their own businesses.

Good managers are dissatisfied. They're not happy with the status quo and always seek innovation and efficiency. They are willing to adapt and even seek out change. Good managers

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are organized. They take time to arrange all aspects of the farm for increased efficiency, are focused, and prioritize tasks to accomplish.

Good managers are risk takers. They view the future offensively and are willing to take risks. They understand the risk/returns relationship as it relates to opportunity cost. Good managers are smart, but this isn't necessarily associated with formal education. They read, attend training, understand economics, are lifelong learners, and are curious to discover. They want to teach, not employ, the next generation.

Good managers work hard and are not lazy, but they take time to recharge. Vacations are not for luxury, but rather are opportunities to step away from the business, allowing time to unwind and others to assume leadership roles in your absence. A well-managed farm should not require the manager's presence for 52 weeks a year.

Dr. David Kohl, who will return to Owensboro in a few weeks for discussion at the Grain Day Legacy series, has a quote that I've repeated numerous times and reflect on often. He says, "Good managers manage around the unmanageable." Meaning there are daily obstacles that come up in any business, and farming is at the top of the list. Top managers can seek alternatives to manage around what is out of their control.

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