
Introducing Alleah Heise

Ag Progress is excited to introduce our new team member, [Alleah Heise](#). Alleah is providing facilitation and advisory services that move family business forward. Her seven years' experience with another family advisory firm brings new perspective and tools to our company and clients.

Alleah was raised in southwest Kansas. Her family has a third-generation business hauling cattle and servicing the fuel and lubrication needs of farmers. She is a graduate of Oklahoma State and Friends University with a Master's in Business Law. She lives in Dodge City, Kansas with her husband and daughter. We hope you have an opportunity to meet and welcome her soon!

Spotting Talent

By [Davon Cook](#)

Finding the right talent is a priority of most business people. There's a typical list of attributes often included in a job description: "We're looking for hard-working, dedicated problem solvers..." After a while, those words become trite and overused. More meaningful to me are two vivid words that many people identify with at a deeper level: grit and potential.

Grit. Having lived in West Texas, I can tell you what grit is. It's the sand in your teeth and ears after a day working outside in a typical sandstorm...or your legs getting sandblasted running at a HS track meet! That visceral memory of grit in its physical form has a parallel with the current usage in describing people. It's someone who's tough, can dig into difficult situations and not give up, and has staying power.

Angela Duckworth stressed the term in [Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance](#), which chronicles her academic pursuit studying the success of those with high measures of grit. She defines grit as, "In sum, no matter the domain, the highly successful had a kind of ferocious determination that played out in two ways. First, these exemplars were unusually resilient and hardworking. Second, they knew in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted...It was this combination of *passion* and *perseverance* that made high achievers special. In a word, they had grit." (p.219 Kindle edition) Her studies showed that grit was a predictor of success in a variety of settings from West Point cadets surviving the Beast training program, to sales personnel learning the ropes, to students graduating from the Chicago Public Schools.

She goes on to explain that we often focus too much on inherent *talent* and undervalue *effort*. Workers who put in unwavering *effort* to master a new skill or reach a specific goal—even if they are not talented at it from the beginning--are quite valuable. That's grit.

Potential. Along a similar line, Claudio Fernández-Aráoz in a 2014 *Harvard Business Review* article [21st Century Talent Spotting](#) reflects on a long career of executive recruiting. Why did some candidates with resumes full of relevant experience not succeed while others with diverse backgrounds considered "unqualified" did? He realized that "potential", defined as "the ability to adapt to and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments" was the difference. He now considers potential to be "the most important predictor of success."

Obviously, the tricky part is how to identify potential. Look for these five indicators:

- The right motivation: fierce commitment toward *unselfish* goals



- Curiosity: track record of seeking new experiences and information; a life-long learner
- Insight: ability to gather and make sense of information
- Engagement: able to communicate and persuade others with facts *and* emotion
- Determination: fight for difficult goals and bounce back (also known as...grit!)

It's easy to consider tractor driving experience for a field operator position. But beyond that, query for experiences (which may be found in their personal pursuits as well as prior jobs) that demonstrate the curiosity to learn new things or ability to influence others. You're looking for someone with *potential* to learn new technology as it comes along, to grow into a crew leader or executive someday, who's motivated for the whole team's success. When we open our minds to potential that looks a bit different than the traditional path, we open the recruiting window to a whole new set of people and skills. I've seen numerous examples of non-traditional recruits to production ag that are quite successful.

If either of these concepts—grit or potential—resonate with you, I encourage you pick up this literature and consider how it could be utilized in your talent recruiting and talent management efforts.

Keeping Talent

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

Having worked with some great management teams in agricultural family businesses over the years, I've been reflecting on what the owners do to keep outstanding people in their organizations. Here are three tangible ways owners keep the best talent.

1. **Give them room.** The best operations give their people a chance to make the decisions that affect them and their work. This means helping managers understand the goal, then giving them leeway in determining how best to meet that objective. For example, the team member might decide when and where to move cattle based on grazing and weight gain objectives, what fields to harvest next based on logistics, and how best to direct other people so the work gets done timely. They are involved in decisions about equipment purchases and trades, included in the process of seed selection and crop rotations, calving schedules and even the hiring of new staff.
2. **Provide resources.** "Resources" applies to everything from compensation to time to tools to knowledge. It doesn't mean that the best operations have an open checkbook, or are always at the top of the pay scale. Rather, it means that decisions involving time, money, information, technology and people are approached strategically. They ask about the highest and best use of an asset. They look broadly at the pros and cons of financial decisions and share information. They think about both the tangible and intangible benefits of their strategy, for example, how technology investments can provide a return *and* attract a younger generation to the business. They are fast-paced but take time to communicate and get on the same page. And they invest in the development of their people, through conferences, peer groups and educational opportunities like [TEPAP](#) or [The Progress Coach](#).
3. **Demonstrate care.** As I look at the businesses we've served over the years, it becomes clear that the owners care for their people, and that care creates a long-lasting connection. A few ways we see this demonstrated include: quietly helping with living expenses (often by continuing their pay) when a medical crisis occurs; providing opportunities for the team's family members to celebrate business success (trips, events, parties, etc.); and allowing team members to participate in new business ventures or opportunities. There are also many non-financial ways to demonstrate care. Simply inquiring about a team member's family, sharing a meal, spending time talking with them about their dreams and career goals, or, if you are an older business owner, sharing your wisdom, advice and the lessons you've learned.

With the labor challenges every farm or ranch faces, keeping your best people is a priority. It takes a willingness to invest in others and occasionally change your practices and expectations. The payoff is a team of people committed to both personal and business success.

