

# INCREASING TALENT USING AGRIBUSINESS



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-AGRA 2015

Youth involvement in agriculture has been a topic on a number of African countries' development plans as a key to food security in the future. Yet this seems a daunting task. More often than not, the challenge is either how to move from idea to implementation or a not so clear plan on how to actively engage the youth in agriculture and agribusiness. The potential for the young and active to increase economic gains in agriculture is high but how do we translate potential into reality? Agribusiness in itself is an avenue to practically develop and increase talent.

It provides hands on experience which enhances understanding and brings meaning to the theories taught in lecture halls. Once they get their hands dirty, it all begins to make sense.

According to AFDB, Africa has the youngest population in the world and each year 10-12 million of its young people seek to enter the continent's workforce, too many without success.

This highlights the great challenge of youth unemployment but can also be seen as an opportunity for them to become the engine driving new agriculture and agribusiness enterprises.

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AGRIPRO, as a result of necessity and limited capital, started to develop innovative solutions that engaged students from 5 major universities in Ghana. We set up outposts/clubs and then took our first set of interns. We sent out fliers and posters, Facebook posts and Whatsapp messages; reeling in about 30 students who went through a full-day of assessment and interview sessions. We shortlisted and invited the eight finalists in for a two-day orientation. The goal was to get them ready for the tasks ahead, for the feats they will someday write about,

for the “out-of-comfort-zone-days” and the whole learning process. Orientation was training time, vision casting, identifying strengths and weaknesses and bonding time. Eight uncertain yet passionate university students walked into the co-working space where we worked from on a Monday morning, ready to conquer the world!

Fast forward two months, we had organized Accra’s first ever local and organic farmers market, planned and executed an agribusiness entrepreneurship competition and initiated the development of a new brand. Tapping into the knowledge pool and individuals skills of these students who were then studying Psychology, Business Administration and/or Agribusiness Management

we achieved a lot in a short period. We were looking out for what value they brought or could bring to the table as a basis of assigning projects and tasks. Team work was a major player over the two months as each project was tackled by a huddle of at least three interns. They were involved in ideation, planning, execution and evaluation; made them feel important and a part.

We think we have stumbled on a proven strategy to develop talents through implementing projects in agriculture and agribusiness. We think this strategy is applicable to non-agric related endeavors as well. In order for work to be effective, you have to care as much about staff as much as you care about your business. If it were possible to successfully grow a company

on your own, there would be no need for this paper.



Since you need people to help grow the brand, you will need a development plan. Effective human resource development strategies increase productivity and performance in any given institution. Formal or informal, drawing up a plan of what the future of employees will look like relative to the vision of your company helps to fish out and reconcile all discrepancies, even if it means letting go

of a few good employees over time. Increasing talent demands a deliberate effort to value employees based on what they bring and can potentially bring to the table and how to use that to benefit both individual and company.

**What value do they propose to offer?**

**Can they deliver on their propositions?**

**With a little training and coaching, what are they most likely to excel at?**

**What personal future plans do they have?**

Once these questions are answered, you can now draw a plan or road map aimed at business and employee success. Once they understand

that their success is tied to their actions and they sense some form of security, all things being equal, it will be difficult for them to leave you hanging.

In the first few weeks of the internship, no day would pass without us having a pitching practice session.

Currently, the staff at Agripro have a 15-minute conversation each morning discussing random business development and productivity topics to help shape our conversational skills. Trainings and coaching can never be overemphasized in your development strategy. Trainings should be as practical as possible, actively involving the trainees. In the midst of all the fun and excitement, an important component is the entrepreneurial culture.

Involve the youth in decision making in the projects you want them to run. Allowing them to dream up and brainstorm solutions to problems creates a channel for creative thinking and innovation. It also creates a sense of belonging if their ideas are inculcated in the final decision, making them eager to consistently develop the idea and work towards seeing it materialize.

Not all the young people you train will stay in your company, some will leave to follow their dreams or may be poached [yes, that's a reality]; but whatever the case, they would have helped you achieve some of your goals or drawn you closer to achieving them; you would have also impacted their lives and this will be evident to their subsequent employers. What we are still working on is talent retention.

A few of our amazing interns stayed with us for about a year but a majority has either started their own company or is working with some high earned financial institution, production company, business accelerator platform or digital agency. Let's share with you some mistakes we discovered over the years that we made we think you should avoid:

## **Failing To Keep Up With Expectations**

As staff grows, their needs and expectations grow, whether or not your company is growing at the same speed; and it is expedient that you keep abreast with these expectations and address them accordingly. It has to be financially rewarding for them. After a while, the family feeling begins to wear off if they don't benefit financially from working with you.

The different parts of the agribusiness value chain opens up opportunities for a large number of diverse groups to work or implement projects in agribusiness, using it as a tool to increase skill set. Our proven strategy guides you to effectively implement projects in agribusiness, and any other institution.

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