
The Art of Working Together



Melbah M. Smith, Former Executive Director
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives

Member, Cooperative Hall of Fame



Background

- Born in Brandon, MS within a family of four
- Began my career with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives as a Cooperative Organizer/Specialist
 - Organized both co-ops and Community Development Credit Unions
 - Joined the Cooperative Movement in 1962
 - Served on the Board of Directors of the South Rankin County Farmers Cooperative for 17 years
 - Still an active member



Vision

- Habakkuk 2: 2-4

And the Lord said, write the Vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it!

For the Vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie, though it tarry, wait for it-FAITH, because it will surely come, it will not tarry!

-----they just shall live by faith!



Mission

- Example: Our mission is to bring value to our member owners, customers and communities by providing reliable, superior service and innovative solutions.
 - Includes task/strategies necessary to accomplish this mission

“Working Together Works”



Cooperatives

- Cooperatives are organized to serve their members
- Provide goods and services both to their membership as well as the community
- Strengthens the economic, social and cultural base of the community too
- Become a partner within the community

“People working together to accomplish”



Cooperative Principles

- Open membership – open to all persons who have a common need or interest
 - Complete an application for membership
 - Attend at least (3) membership education classes
 - Purchase 1 share of common stock
 - Received membership approval by the Board
- One person one vote – Co-ops democratically controlled by their members
 - Each member has one vote to decide matters of policy
 - Members use their vote for choosing directors who make the policies for the co-op



Cooperative Principles

- Limited return on investment
 - For the co-op to get off the ground, the members themselves will have to invest some money and time in it. This is limited in order to prevent a few from making large controlling investments



Cooperative Principles

- Benefits Returned According to Use (Patronage Refund)
- Constant Expansion
 - Co-ops should always be ready to grow and increase its capacity to serve its members
- Constant Education
 - Since this form of economics is new to most people, education is constantly needed by the members to understand and operate their co-op.
 - A regular membership education program should be established to keep member informed and involved in the affairs of the co-op.



Cooperative Principles

- Concern for the Community
 - Co-ops work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members, work to improve their communities by supporting programs, events and activities, etc.



Board of Directors

- Board of Directors of the cooperative is elected by the members
 - Nominating process
 - Bylaws determine the # of Directors and the terms
 - There are staggered terms which allows for consistency
 - They:
 - **Set long range plans and goals for the future – moving toward the vision**
 - Ensure sound management of the co-op's resources



Board of Directors

- Act as trustee on behalf of the members
- Select and define the role of the manager and any other staff that handles the day to day of the co-op
- When necessary, appoint committees to work on specific goals (can be comprised of Board and co-op members)
- Keep membership informed; hold quarterly meeting – discussions with membership on plans going forward – seek their input



Qualities of Effective Co-op Leaders

- Ability to hear fully what others are saying
- Ability to hear critical feedback w/o becoming defensive
- Ability to respond with openness when others disagree
- Know your weaknesses
- Foster an environment of sharing the stage with others



Qualities of Effective Co-op Leaders

- Ability to appreciate the contributions of others
- Stay on topic
- Be able to function well in chaos
- Ability to put others at ease during conversation
- Can follow as well as lead
- Follow through on commitments



Characteristics of Good Team Member

- Honest and straight forward – a good team member is upfront
- Share the load – a good team member does his or her fair share of the work
- Reliable – can be counted on
- Fair, positive attitude
- Complements others' skills
- Good communication skills



Membership

- Elect members of the Board of Directors
- Approve bylaws
- Serve on committees appointed by the Board
- Attend meetings, workshops, conferences when available (keep abreast)

Remember this is your cooperative!!





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