Welcome to another AG LEGACY recording.

AG LEGACY is a series of presentations and other online materials intended to assist rural families in creating their own legacy by beginning the thought process and opening the lines of communication.

Today's recording will address the question "Does disrespect have a place in your Ag Legacy?"

Ag Legacy

Helping agriculture nurture its legacy. . .

Agriculture & Horticulture
University of Wyoming Extension

Today's speaker

Caleb Carter

Consultant to the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics in the University of Wyoming College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Ag Legacy

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I'm Caleb Carter, consultant to the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics in the University of Wyoming College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
I will be your speaker for today's AG LEGACY presentation

Does Disrespect have a place in your Ag Legacy?

Caleb Carter, consultant to the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics
John P. Hewlett – Farm/Ranch Management Specialist

Disrespect can take many forms. And while sometimes the effects on us and our relationships may seem small, over time, even the small acts of disrespect, if not addressed, can lead to hurt feelings, anger, frustration, and broken relationships.

Adding to an already difficult process when the family is working to pass on the management responsibilities of the family farm or ranch. But there are steps that can be taken to identify, address, and deal with disrespect in our relationships before it becomes a problem.

Nick and Steven were good friends, and, as brothers growing up, spent a lot of time not only working on the family ranch, but also hanging out with friends and family whenever they had the chance. Things changed after Frank, their dad, passed. Nick was still at home helping on the ranch. Steven had taken a job in another state and wasn't around as much. Nick worked hard to keep things going, but Frank had left a lot of debt that nobody was aware he had taken on. On top of that, their mom was not doing well. Her dementia was progressing rapidly, making it difficult for Nick and his wife to take care of her.

Whenever Steven would visit, they would end up in huge arguments. Steven, though he tried to understand, often felt in the dark about why Nick was always so frustrated. Nick, as the eldest, felt he should carry the burden, as his father had, and didn't share his feelings very easily. Instead, he often blamed Steven for not being around to help. But when Steven would offer to help, Nick would just shrug him off.

The last time Steven visited the ranch, Nick told him off, saying that he should just butt out, along with more than a few other choice words, because he couldn't understand their struggles living so far away. Steven left feeling that he didn't have a place at the ranch anymore and was angry at his brother for pushing him out.

How can Nick and Steven find a way to address this rift between them and confront the hostility and feelings of disrespect in their relationship?

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Disrespect in the family

Disrespectful and rude comments are difficult to deal with when at work or in a social situation. But can be even more difficult and personal when it is a family member sending you the negativity.

As family, we know each other best, not only how we like our coffee or our favorite ice cream flavor, but also our weaknesses, fears, and vulnerabilities. It's often family members that can love the strongest, but also hurt the worst. This familial bond can make it more personal and the option of walking away may not be possible.

Let’s take a step back now to talk about what is defined as disrespect. Because people will define it differently. And what one person sees as disrespect, to another might just be “getting animated”.

At its basic level, disrespect is a lack of respect or courtesy. In relationships it can be more complex than that. In addition, where some forms of disrespect are more subtle, that does not mean they are less destructive. Understanding why people are disrespectful can help us better understand it.

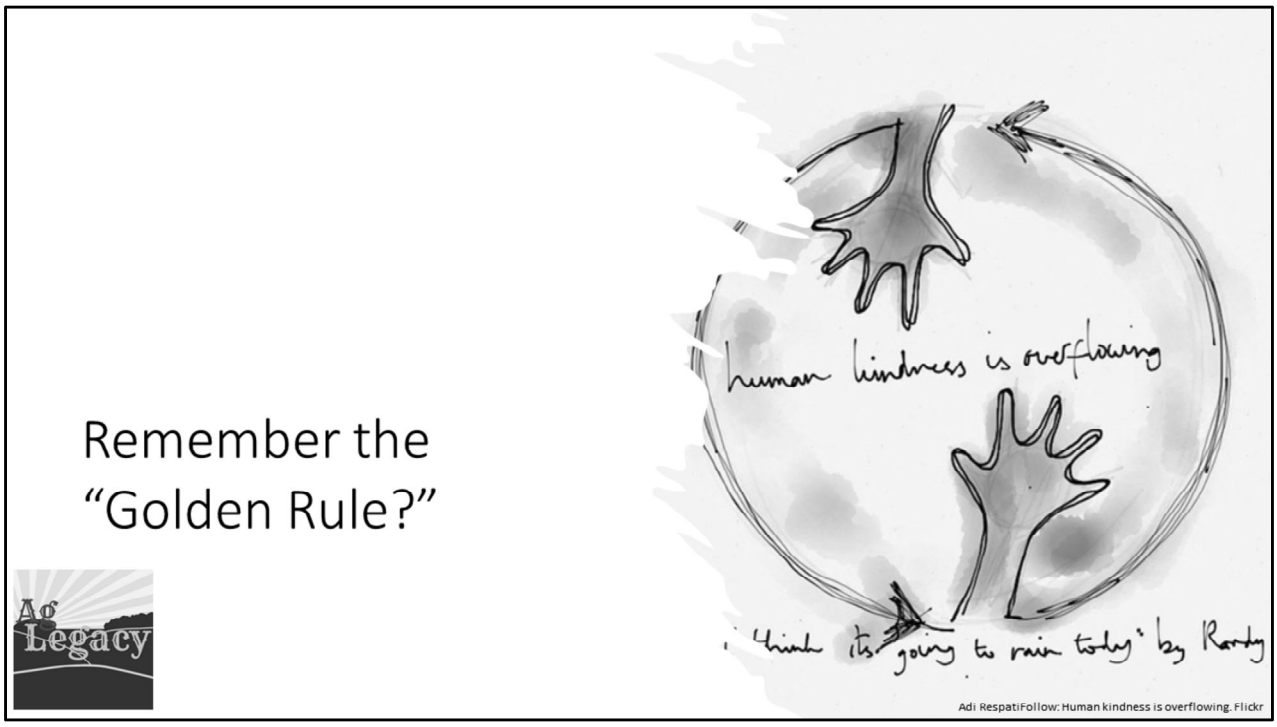
How can we identify disrespect in our family? Jennifer Gill Rosier, PhD (The Family Coach) presented five ways family members can show disrespect (Salomon, 2014):

• **Disgracing**. Criticizing or insulting others by name calling, shaming, or attacks on a person's character.
• **Dramatizing**. Using absolute language such as "always", "never", "all", "none", etc. to describe family members in a negative way. Such as "You never did care about me;" "You never listen to me;" "You always boss me around;" and "You will always be a loser;" etc.
• **Dictating**. Giving orders or commands to other family members that place an individual on top in hierarchy over them.
• **Disregarding**. Ignoring or rejecting other family members comments, feelings, or interests.
• **Dominating**. Controlling the conversation by inhibiting others involvement by interrupting, talking over, or simply overpowering the conversation. Or dictating how others should feel, think, etc.

Disrespect is Different than Harassment

It is important to note that there is an important distinction between rude, disrespectful actions and bullying and harassment.

Where disrespectful or rude comments become physical or become blatant personal attacks, that must be addressed and not ignored. It is also okay to realize that sometimes you need to put your foot down and make it known that you won't accept rude comments or behavior. Harassment or bullying is never okay from anyone, even family members.



Do you remember the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?" Consider the possible long-term ramifications of your reactions. Controlling how we react towards someone who is being disrespectful can help us stay in control while helping to break the cycle. We can choose to help diffuse a situation or make it worse.

While we may not be able to change the other person's behavior or attitude, we can at least walk away knowing we didn't contribute to or spread the negativity.

Don’t personalize the negativity

It’s also important to remember not to personalize the negativity. While the other person may try to make it all about you, remember, it’s about them, not you. This can help remove a big weight from your shoulders as you try to address what is really going on.

Reacting to disrespect

- Empathy
- Let it roll off your back
- Be willing to go first

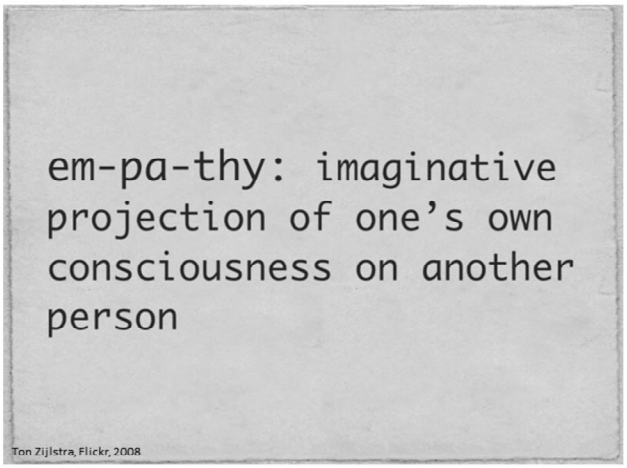
Sometimes simply ignoring the comments can be an effective strategy. Avoid dropping to their level or engaging in their negativity. Other times you may need to engage a person who is acting disrespectful.

Professional speaker, trainer and author Sandy Geroux offers some helpful guidance on dealing with disrespectful people:

• **Summon as much empathy for the other person as you can**. Ask yourself, "Does the person usually act like this or is it out of character?" Put yourself in their shoes and try to give them the benefit of the doubt.

• **Try to let rude actions roll off your back**, remembering that each person is different and should be viewed as having a "clean slate." This can be difficult in family situations where we often know each other well and can be prone to "unburying the hatchet".

• **Be willing to go first**. Feelings of disrespect, anger, and frustration feed on themselves. People who are feeling these emotions will try to bring you down to their level. Be willing to rise above the situation by being the one to show respect first. This may help the person to step back and reevaluate their behavior. If nothing else, you have maintained your integrity.



Engaging appropriately

Kindness

- Thank you
- I appreciate your perspective
- I love myself and I love you too

You may still need an appropriate response to help diffuse the situation and keep you from getting sucked into the negativity. We find some responses that may be helpful at the PowerofPosivity.com.

Choosing to show kindness in the face of negativity can be very powerful by addressing disrespectful comments without lashing back. In addition, it can help to diffuse an otherwise heated situation. For example, you could respond with:

• **Thank you**. Combating rudeness with kindness can go a long way. Saying "Thank you" acknowledges the person's rudeness while letting them know you won't allow it to affect you. It also reflects your maturity. You didn't get angry or ignore them.

I appreciate your perspective. This may surprise them as you acknowledge their comment but wish to communicate in an adult manner. Further rude comments from the other person only reinforces their lack of self confidence in themselves as they try to bring you down.

• **I love myself and I love you too.** While perhaps not appropriate in all settings, when dealing with family members expressions of love and compassion can help remind everyone who they are talking to.

Kindness always prevails over negativity, just as darkness cannot thrive where light is present. We all need this reminder sometimes and expressing it out loud can be very powerful.

Sometimes choosing sarcasm or laughter can also help alleviate the tension:
• **That almost hurt my feelings**. Sometimes sarcasm can help diffuse a situation, or at least let the person know that their negativity is not rubbing off on you. It may also help discourage further remarks, as you have shown that they don't affect you.
• **Laughter**. Laughter can also be a powerful way to diffuse a situation and will most certainly catch the offender off guard. The other person may also feel embarrassed by their comment. Again, you are demonstrating that you won't allow their rude comments to affect your mood or your life.

At other times you may feel that you need to be more bold and stand up for yourself:

• **This conversation is over**. If you can't avoid an angry response, simply end the conversation. It's not worth causing damage to a relationship by losing your cool. While you are not pretending that their comment or question was acceptable, you are also avoiding an all-out brawl.

Where you feel that you need to be bold but also want to draw attention to the individual, the following responses might be more appropriate. Understand, however, that you may make things worse in the heat of the moment:

• **Why do you feel that was necessary? Do you really expect me to answer?** This puts the person on the spot, especially in a group setting. Maybe giving them time to rethink their stance and apologize. If they respond that they indeed do want a response, you can still simply refuse and move on.
• **You always have something negative to say, don't you?** Take the focus off you and redirect it back to the other person and their own words. Force them to reconsider their choice of words in the future. This may also add flame to the fire, so be careful. But standing up for yourself is important too.

What happens if you are the disrespectful one?

You may find that you are the one being disrespectful. John Salomon, PhD, councilor, and Adjunct Faculty at Carlow University, recommends several strategies to help us turn our own disrespectful comments around (Salomon, 2014).

- **Encourage**. Build up family members by making positive comments. Honor them with words.
- **Deal with situations as they come**. Avoid using absolute words such as “always” and “never.” Rather, deal with each situation as it comes up.
- **Invest in your family**. Make chores and other duties a family project, including everyone, especially yourself.
- **Honor your family members with your attention**. Turn off the TV or video game and focus on family time.
- **Include everyone**. Take time to listen and look each person in the eye in conversation.
- **Get curious**. Take time to understand each person’s feelings, thoughts, and desires and consider them when making plans.

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Disrespect in your Ag Legacy

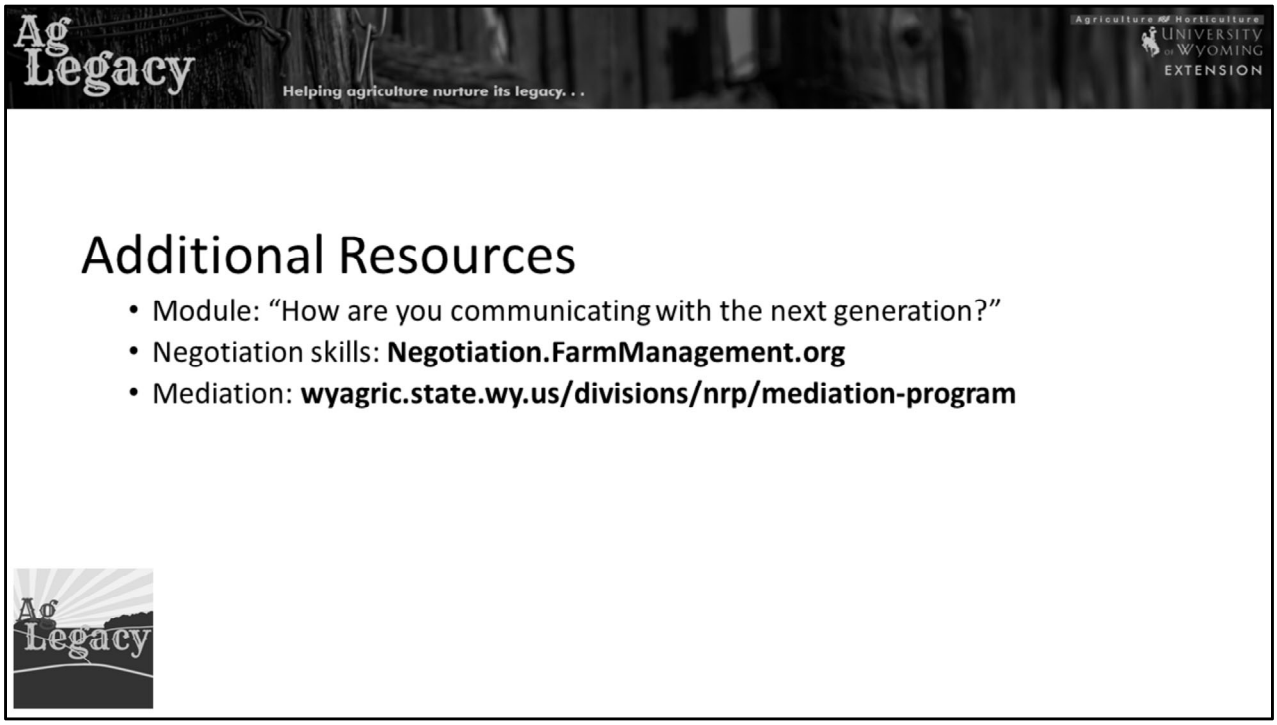
Times of change and uncertainty can increase feelings of frustration, helplessness, insecurity, and vulnerability, and can trigger disrespectful behavior.

These emotions can surface quickly when families are discussing succession of the family farm or ranch. Even more so when family members are forced into these discussions at the death of a loved one.

Communication

Open communication is important in combating these emotions, clearly discussing approaches to handle disagreements, frustrations, and disrespect among family members. Honestly admitting problems exist or that they might appear can help diffuse difficult emotions before they become problematic.

Disrespect might also be a sign that someone is feeling that they are not being heard or that their ideas are not valued by other family members. Providing structured opportunities for family members to listen to, share, and discuss their ideas can help address these frustrations. Regularly-scheduled family councils and family business meetings can also provide opportunities to express frustrations.



There are enough challenges in creating and passing on your Ag Legacy. Don't let disrespect amongst family members be the hammer that destroys. If disrespect does arise in your discussions, identify the reason, and address it before it brings everyone down. For more information on building your Ag Legacy visit **AgLegacy.org**.

Resources are available to improve communication, as well as learning better negotiation skills or seeking outside help through mediation. Negotiation skills aren't just for the used car lot. They can also be helpful in working together when contentious topics arise in the family. For more on negotiation skills, see: **Negotiation.FarmManagement.org**.

Mediation is another approach that can help address contentious issues and lack of communication by assisting both sides to be heard. For more information, see the Wyoming Department of Agriculture Mediation Program: **wyagric.state.wy.us/divisions/nrp/mediation-program**.

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