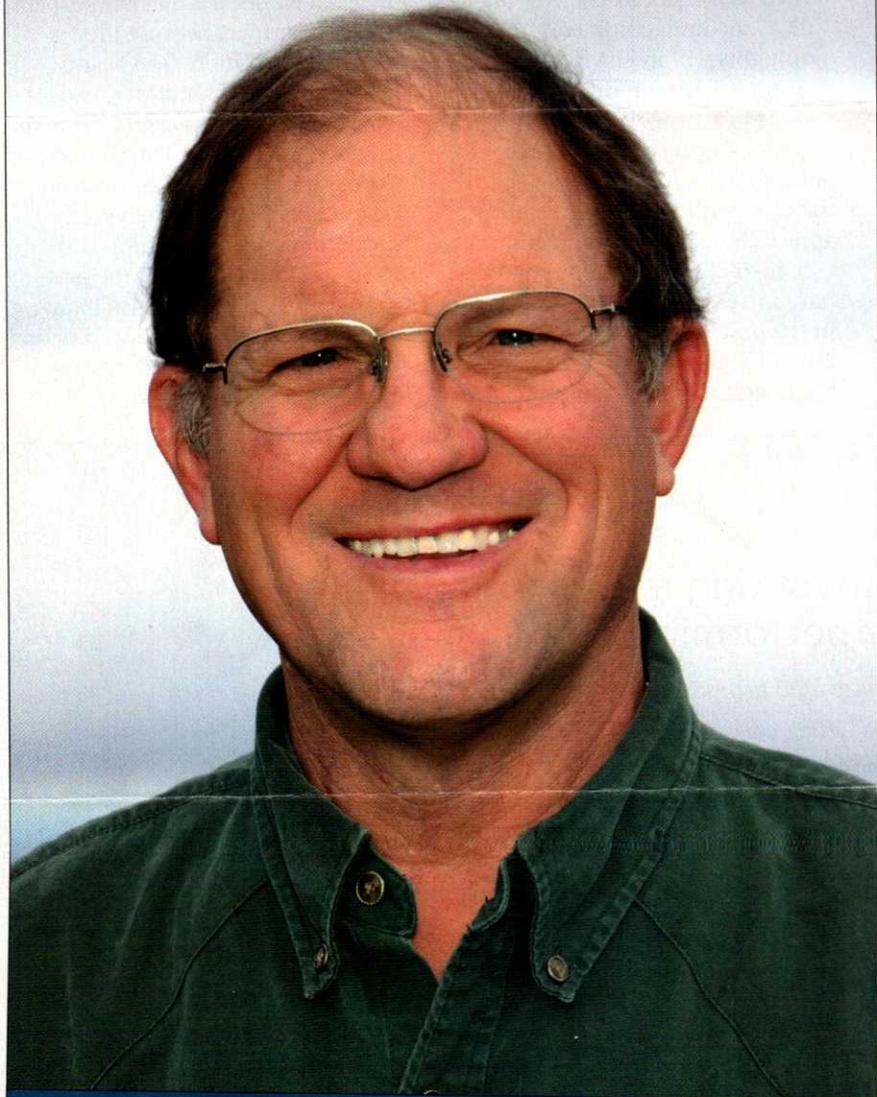


An “Honesty Imperative” Changed My Business Life

Dick Wittman > Producer and farm finance consultant



> At home in Culdesac, Idaho, Dick Wittman manages a 19,000-acre dryland crop, cattle and timber operation with three family partners. He also provides seminars, workshops and private consulting services on a part-time basis to agricultural lenders and farmers. He has served as president of the Farm Financial Standards Council and is a founding member of the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association. Wittman and his wife, Dawn, have raised five children. The Wittman family sponsors an Outdoor Education Camp located on their farm in cooperation with the local Boys and Girls Club.

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Before I came back to the family farm, I spent eight years working for the Farm Credit System. I held positions in accounting, large loan approvals and credit reviews, and ended up at Farm Credit in Washington, D.C., supervising operations in 17 states. Having supervisory responsibility for bank presidents twice my age was a recipe for disaster! Many grumbled about working with me, especially those with performance problems. Finally, a supervisor took me aside, saying: “You suffer from a disease known as the ‘honesty imperative’—a tendency to say it like it is without understanding peoples’ personalities and strategizing more tactful ways to deliver criticism.”

That supervisor sent me to a three-day training on interpersonal relationships. It changed my life. One of my biggest career mistakes was failing to understand how personalities need to be managed.

To this day, I credit the learning experiences related to “mismanaging” people as a part of our farm success. I now work with three farm partners and 10 other employees, some of whom are family. I encourage

other partners and employees to do personality testing. This helps us understand how best to work with each other and helps take the emotion out of communications.

For example, I’m a “D”, which stands for “Driver” or “Dominant,” and I tend to push my agenda without listening. Now when we have disputes, others can say, “Dick, you are being a ‘D’ today,” and I know what that means without being upset. I still have lapses in remembering how important this is, but changing the way I talk to one person can make all the difference between success and failure that day. —*Jeanne Bernick*