



**LifeKnowledge[®]
At Work**

To advance the integration of LifeKnowledge through local teachers.

February 2007

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LifeKnowledge AT WORK Newsletter Designed for Local Teachers

LifeKnowledge AT WORK is a newsletter created by the National FFA Organization to advance the integration of LifeKnowledge in local agricultural education classrooms across America. Designed with local teachers in mind, LifeKnowledge AT WORK is a free electronic newsletter featuring tips from teachers, education experts, leadership gurus and a host of other resources.

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LifeKnowledge Featured Articles

LifeKnowledge Online Now Available!

What is LifeKnowledge (LK) Online? LK Online is the new and improved version of LifeKnowledge. It is conveniently available via the Web, and has several new features as well as the original features including 257 lesson plans, integration and planning tools, and learning modules. [Click here to read article](#)

The Importance of Coaching Students and Using the LK Coaching Guide

Randy Vlasin, Education Specialist and former agriculture teacher, talks about the importance of coaching students and offers advice on using the new LifeKnowledge Coaching Guide. [Click here to read article](#)

The Importance of Assessing Leadership Skills

Education Specialist Christine White answers questions regarding the importance of assessing leadership skills and how teachers can use the LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator to their advantage. [Click here to read article](#)

How We "Empowered" Others Using a Personal Influence Plan

Ag teachers Becky Carter and James Beatty talk about how personal influence plans at Delta II resulted in a dynamic conference that helped their peers learn about LifeKnowledge. [Click here to read article.](#)

Featured Lesson

LK in Action

A-Mazing Teamwork

Looking for an activity to help build teamwork among your chapter officers, committee members or students in your class? Check out an activity that allows students to work together and form a team as they have to navigate challenges and a maze as a group. [Click here to read article](#)

Hot Tips

Small Group Discussion Strategy

Looking for a way to organize and make small group discussions productive learning experiences? Check out an activity designed to keep students engaged while working in small discussion groups. [Click here to read article](#)

LifeKnowledge News

What's New with LK

– LifeKnowledge Online Now Available
– We Want Your LifeKnowledge Success Stories
[Click here to read article](#)



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Featured Lesson Plan – What don't I know about the birds and the bees? – Backyard Habitats

Agriculture teacher and FFA advisor Mandy Kern from Hiawatha, Kan., shares a lesson "What don't I know about the birds and the bees? – Backyard Habitats." Mandy integrates the LifeKnowledge precept of Relationships into her lesson.

[Click here to read article](#)

LifeKnowledge Online Now Available!

What is LifeKnowledge (LK) Online?

LK Online is the new and improved version of LifeKnowledge. It is conveniently available via the Web, and has several new features as well as the original features including 257 lesson plans, integration and planning tools, and learning modules.

What are the new features of LK Online?

In addition to all the great features of the original version, LK Online offers teachers improved accessibility, a Precept Indicator and Coaching Guide.

- LK Online can be accessed from *any* computer with Internet connectivity, and includes automatic program updates.
- The Precept Indicator enables teachers to assess student achievement levels based on 15 precepts of leadership.
- The Coaching Guide tool helps teachers quickly and effectively use events in agricultural education for individual or group coaching.

What is the Subscription fee?

The annual subscription fee for LK Online features an introductory price of \$59 per FFA chapter. If new features are added during the subscription period, the chapter receives new updates automatically at no additional charge. Once a chapter subscribes to LK Online, they can create individual teacher and students accounts.

How can I order LK Online?

You can order LK Online by calling the FFA call center at 1-888-332-2668 or by faxing the call center at 1-800-366-6556. LK Online will also be available in the 2007-08 Core Catalog. When ordering LK Online, reference item number LK-07.

Who can order LK online?

LK Online can be ordered by any FFA chapter. Once the chapter subscribes, additional teachers and students can be added to the system to gain access.

What do I get for my subscription?

A subscription to LK Online will entitle the subscribing FFA chapter to enroll all of the agriculture teachers in their program, and will provide access to the following tools:

- Precept Indicator
- Coaching Guide
- LK Lessons
- Integration Ideas
- E-Moments
- Learning Modules
- Planning Tools

Each teacher will be able to enroll students into the system and manage student progress by assigning LK Precept Indicator assessments and running reports. Students enrolled in the LK Online system will have access to assigned indicators and reports.

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The Importance of Coaching Students and Using the LK Coaching Guide

By Randy Vlasin, Education Specialist, LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education

As teachers, we are trained in the presentation of information but do not receive much training on how to "coach" students individually or as a group. Yet, by approaching our job with a coaching mentality, we can significantly add to our educational program and strengthen a student's retention of the information we present them.

There are two main reasons why agricultural education teachers should approach their job as a coach. First, with today's technology, the scenario of the teacher being the "all knowing dispenser of information" is coming to an end. Teachers need to become "coaches" of learning so they can



show students how to find, analyze, and apply information that produces results. Second, ag teachers often deal with students in one-on-one settings with opportunities to “coach” them through a variety of situations. For example, a student may need help in developing a personal SAE plan, evaluating what FFA opportunities are best for them, or setting up a plan for future educational choices after high school. Agricultural education instructors spend significant amounts of time in and out of class with students. Due to this amount of student contact, teachers have the opportunity to coach in technical content, but often also step into the role of a “life coach” in helping students with important personal decisions.

“When you are sincere about coaching a student and helping them become the best they can be, they develop trust and confidence in you as a teacher. That trust and confidence spills over into the classroom.”

Coaching is not easy and like everything else, it takes practice. That is why the National FFA developed the Coaching Guide as part of LifeKnowledge Online. This online guide provides basics on how to conduct a productive coaching session both for individuals and as a group. Not only does it explain the format for coaching, it gives examples of language to use that will help students find solutions to their challenges as opposed to simply telling students what to do. Coaching a student toward finding their own solutions encourages strong decision making skills and develops self-confidence when solving problems or addressing challenges. This can lead to increased motivation to follow through and creates a stronger sense of self-leadership and accountability.

Agricultural education instructors are also faced with group coaching situations other than career development events. For example, coaching students to organize and carry out activities such as banquet or community service can be a challenge. As an ag teacher myself, I often fell into the trap of taking on the role of “organizer and promoter” rather than having students take on these roles. The truth is, sometimes it's easier and more efficient to do it yourself than to teach students how to organize and carry out a plan. However, agricultural education was designed for learning to take place in all aspects of the program, including FFA activities. If one of our goals is to help students develop leadership, then we should focus on what students will learn by being involved in this activity. The Coaching Guide has 257 activities, each aligned to one or more of the Essential Learnings Precepts and relating to Classroom, FFA or SAE. The majority of these lessons are designed as “grab-n-go” activities so they are a quick reference and easy to use. In some cases, these can be used so that students can teach each other. Teachers can also utilize the interactive tutorial that accompanies the guide, which provides step-by-step guidance through the coaching guide components.

One of the most valuable components of the Coaching Guide is the personal growth plan used in conjunction with the LK Precept Indicator. The purpose of a personal growth plan is to identify strengths and areas of potential growth. The LK Precept Indicator helps as it gives students and teachers' specific information based on 15 leadership precepts including vision, responsibility, character, and relationships. After completing the indicator, students will have a clearer picture of where they are on the leadership development spectrum. This provides a structure for students to create a purposeful growth plan. With the assistance of their teacher, students can take ownership of their own leadership and employment skill development. While the Coaching Guide can help a teacher coach a student, the Precept Indicator provides information that helps a teacher *understand* the student.

As someone who has been involved in professional behavior style analysis for over 10 years, I encourage you to use the Coaching Guide. When I started utilizing self-analysis instruments with my students, it helped me understand where they were coming from and consequently helped me know how to approach them when teaching. When you are sincere about coaching a student and helping them become the best they can be, they develop trust and confidence in you as a teacher. That trust and confidence spills over into the classroom. Students who are confident in their teacher tend to be more engaged, work harder, and learn more. It creates an enjoyable teaching and learning environment for you and the student. Now go forth and coach!

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The Importance of Assessing Leadership Skills

Q&A with Christine White, Education Specialist, LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education



1. Why is it important to assess leadership skills?

As educators, we know the only way to ensure that students understand a concept or process is through an assessment. Before a student uses a tool in shop class, we assess their understanding of the tool's operation as well as safety procedures. If they fail the assessment, we re-teach the information until he or she shows they can properly use the tool. The same can be said when developing leadership and employability skills. If you have a class that is skilled in the area of goal setting, do you need to continue teaching that information or is it better to focus on an area that needs improvement? By assessing a student's leadership and employability skills, you can step away from a “canned” teaching model into a more personalized experience. The guesswork of understanding which leadership skills to teach is eliminated and you're able to focus on those areas of leadership that your students need most.

2. What is the new assessment piece of

LifeKnowledge?

To support the objectives of LifeKnowledge, an assessment called the LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator was created to measure a student's level of achievement relative to the FFA Mission of Premier Leadership, Personal Growth, and Career Success. This assessment is based on the LifeKnowledge Precepts which consist of 15 competencies with skills that business and industry would like students to have when they enter the workforce. These precepts

“Meaningful and purposeful leadership and employability skills are what business and industry demand. LifeKnowledge, supported by the Precept Indicator, helps students meet

include action, awareness, character, communication, continuous improvement, decision making, emotional growth, flexibility and adaptability, mental growth, physical growth, professional growth, relationships, social growth, spiritual growth, and vision.

those needs while adding credibility to your program."

By using the LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator, teachers and students can measure leadership competencies within each precept. Students are rated within each of the 15 precepts based on four proficiency levels of leadership. These proficiency levels are pre-awareness, awareness, interaction, and mastery. Each proficiency level provides a benchmark for students and teachers to gain a better understanding of the leadership needs of individual students as well as those of a sub-group or specific class.

3. Why was it important for FFA to create an assessment to work in conjunction with LifeKnowledge?

The creation of the LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator addresses the concerns of business and industry leaders who want evidence that substantiates the value of agricultural education in providing every ag ed student with a solid leadership foundation. We have heard time and time again that high school graduates need basic leadership and employability skills that transfer to the workplace. We also know that cultivating these skills at an early age is essential because businesses typically do not have the time or resources to focus on teaching these competencies. The most competitive individuals are those who possess leadership and employability skills before the job interview. With the help of business and industry, FFA developed the LifeKnowledge initiative and from that was born the 15 precepts or Essential Learnings. The Precept Indicator takes this a step further by providing a tangible means of evaluating student progress.

4. How does the assessment augment the leadership already being taught in my ag ed program?

As a former agriculture teacher, I viewed leadership instruction at different levels in my program. In my mind, every student received a form of leadership education based on the class they were taking. For example, introductory classes focused on goal setting while the upper level classes focused on public speaking, job preparation skills and so on. The same type of scenario applied to chapter officers who learned leadership by focusing on skills needed to run the chapter and by participating in workshops, and so forth. However, I realized that using a canned leadership experience during a 90 minute block or specific activity was not necessarily positioning my students for workplace success. My mindset now is that these skills need be taught every day to every student. It is one thing to say your program is developing well-prepared leaders. But if you had to prove it, could you do so? Meaningful and purposeful leadership and employability skills are what business and industry demand. LifeKnowledge, supported by the Precept Indicator, helps students meet those needs while adding credibility to your program.

5. How can the LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator be used in an agriculture program?

The purpose of the LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator is to give teachers a tool to assess student leadership levels within 15 precepts. The results from the indicator, both the pre-test and the post test, will enable teachers to become prescriptive in the delivery of leadership instruction. A few ways teachers can use the indicator include:

- To develop lessons focused on areas of growth for specific classes.
- As a guideline for providing one-on-one instruction.
- To help validate an ag program's leadership development curriculum.
- As a tool to measure student growth within the precepts, thus assessing leadership and employability skills.

Teachers will have the capability to create reports for individuals, for classes, by graduation year, in sub-groups, and so forth. These reports will help teachers determine the best way to help students develop the leadership and employability skills needed to be competent and successful in today's workforce.

6. What are appropriate and inappropriate uses of the LK Indicator?

The LifeKnowledge Precept Indicator is intended for use as a positive assessment of a student's proficiency levels in leadership as defined by the precepts. Since the indicators are delivered through the LifeKnowledge Online system, teachers can assign the indicator to a student and allow them to take the test at school or at home. The reports generated should be used for developing personal growth plans to help students develop within each of the precept areas. Teachers can assess students at the beginning of the year with the pre-test and assess again at year-end to determine growth within each precept. The data collected from individual students and groups of students can be used to determine the type of leadership instruction needed to facilitate this growth. The Precept Indicator should only be used as a tool to measure a student's level of proficiency for the purpose of helping them develop skills in the area of potential growth. It is not intended to be used as a tool to weed students out of your program, as an entrance exam, or when selecting chapter officers. This tool and the results should only be used to help enhance the leadership development of students within an agricultural education program.

7. What are the access rights of teachers and students when using the LK Indicator?

Every teacher in an agricultural education program will have access to the LifeKnowledge Online system once the chapter subscribes to the service. They will then be able to manage their own students as well as chapter level reporting. Teachers will also be able to assign an indicator, monitor a student's progress, and create reports for individual students and groups of students. Teachers will have access to the other features of LK Online such as the Online Coaching Guide, LK Lessons and E-Moments.

Students will be assigned individual user ID's and passwords to gain access to assigned indicators. Student will be able to complete the indicators and review the results. These results are provided to the student in a report along with a set of self-guided activities to help them improve their skills.

8. What types of results are determined from the assessment?

The assessment will help teachers determine the level of mastery that students have achieved for each of the precepts. The four levels are:

- Pre-awareness – This is the lowest level that a student can achieve and indicates that the student may be familiar with some of the concepts within that precept.
- Awareness – Students are at a level where they know basic concepts and skills related to a precept.
- Interaction – Students at this level understand and demonstrate a large number of the skills identified within the precept.
- Mastery – At this level a student understands and can demonstrate over 90% of the skills within the precept.

In addition to the proficiency level for each precept, students will receive a definition explaining what it means to be at that level and how to grow within that precept. The teacher will receive the same information. Teachers will also have access to percentages that indicated levels of proficiency for groups of students or students in a sub-category. In addition, a teacher will receive information regarding the group's achievement within the 72 Signs of Successes.

9. How can you interpret and use the assessment results?

Results from the indicator are designed to be used with the Online Coaching Guide, LK lessons, or as a general guide when creating leadership and employability skill lessons and activities. In the Coaching Guide, you will find ready-to-use templates for students to develop a personal growth plan to help them identify and track areas of potential growth, as well as develop the steps that will help them earn a higher level of achievement within each precept.

The results from the group reports will allow teachers to select the types of experiences that will help multiple students within a certain precept. For example, if the assessment shows that 80% of students in a horticulture class are at a pre-awareness level for responsibility, this should set off an alarm that these students need more instruction in this area. Again, this presents an opportunity for teachers to take a prescriptive approach to teaching.

10. How can the Precept Indicator benefit an agriculture program?

In addition to helping teachers hone in on areas of leadership most relevant to their students, the indicator helps validate what is being taught in the ag classroom. As accountability becomes increasingly important in the education community, this tool will measure and track results within a program and for individual students. Imagine being able to share positive results with your school administrator for a graduating class by showing student improvement in areas that will give them an advantage in college or the workplace. Knowing you are sending students into the world achieving at a higher level of leadership is a powerful concept. It also further emphasizes the importance of ag education in our public schools.

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How We "Empowered" Others Using a Personal Influence Plan

By Rebecca "Becky" Carter, Agriculture Teacher, Virginia, and James Beatty, Agriculture Teacher, West Virginia



At the Delta II Conference last summer, we were asked as members of *Delta Force* to develop personal influence plans. These plans outlined what we as teachers were willing to do to spread the use of LifeKnowledge to our peers within our school, community and state. In each of our plans, we wanted to create a conference for teachers in our respective states that would spread the use of LifeKnowledge and provide more teachers with the tools necessary to be successful in the classroom. Since we are from neighboring states, Virginia and West Virginia, we decided to combine our efforts to reach as many teachers as possible. We collaborated with Virginia Tech as well as Christine White and Randy Vlasin at FFA to create the Empower Conference.

The conference was held November 9 and 10 in Staunton, Virginia and we had more than 40 teachers in attendance. The key objective of Empower was to share the great teaching strategies and learning concepts of LK so that all teachers could help their students reach their potential. Some of the topics covered included information on how to give effective directions to ensure students use their mind before their body, how to effectively use E-Moments, and how to integrate one of the 15 LifeKnowledge precepts into lessons. Participants were also asked whether they orchestrated learning or shoveled information to students. This enabled them to evaluate whether or not they were just giving students facts or if they were allowing students to learn the material based on methods of teaching. Teachers explored learning styles, modalities, brain learning, teaching strategies, and engagement strategies. They demonstrated these skills and incorporated them into a lesson they brought with them. Everyone who attended was open minded and willing to be challenged, which made it even more successful.

The final results of our conference are yet to be determined, but the teacher response has been very positive. We feel that every teacher left inspired to become a better teacher, and we hope they will take the knowledge they gained and share it with other teachers. As conference facilitators, we learned what worked well and what needs improvement. It is our hope that this conference can be used as a baseline to provide more teacher training opportunities in other states. As more Delta participants conduct similar workshops, the number of teachers reached will be amazing. As Delta participants, we feel one of our responsibilities is to share what we've learned with our peers. Empower was a great format for us to do so.

"We feel that every teacher left inspired to become a better teacher, and we hope that they will take the knowledge they gained and share it with other teachers."

Our enthusiasm reflects our appreciation for how LifeKnowledge has made us better teachers. LifeKnowledge makes you think about *what* and *how* you are teaching, not just "here is what you need to know, memorize it." It challenges you to focus on every student on their level and teaches you to be adaptable to different learning styles. It also brings every aspect

of agricultural education together, not just for those students who are involved in FFA or SAE, but for every student in every class. As a result of hands-on activities through the use of LifeKnowledge, our programs are stronger and our students retain the information better. We have established more credibility for our programs at every level, and we have become more successful agricultural educators. Most importantly, we have seen the positive influence it has had on our students in the area of becoming more mature, involved citizens.

For those teachers who are interested in developing a similar conference, our advice is to remember "anything is possible" and never underestimate the influence you have on others. The first step is always the hardest, but after that it becomes easier. Empower is the result of the two of us sharing ideas. Keep it real and remember that the students are your focus. Anything that directly impacts the success of students is worth the risk and time. As teachers, we are here because we care for young people. Empower was a great way for us to share our passion for teaching and student learning. If you have questions or would like more information about Empower, please do not hesitate to contact us at rcarter@essex.k12.va.us or jcbeatty@access.k12.wv.us.

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Featured Lesson Plan – What don't I know about the birds and the bees? – Backyard Habitats

By Mandy Kern, Agriculture Teacher, Hiawatha, Kansas



Mandy Kern is an agriculture educator from Hiawatha, Kan. Her teaching philosophy is that "I am preparing students for careers and social acceptance, and paving their path to becoming influential and successful leaders in agriculture and our community" through her agriculture program. In order to prepare her students for success, Kern develops lessons that challenge her students to connect technical content to real-world situations. Kern believes that it is important to stress the need of morals, ethics, and integrity to her students as she helps mold them for the future. In this lesson, Kern connects backyard habitats to the LifeKnowledge precept of Relationships. Kern also keeps her students engaged in this lesson by using the Hieroglyphics E-Moment. Click on the link provided to explore this exciting lesson on Backyard Habitats.

[To view a complete version of Mandy's lesson, click here.](#)

[To view the accompanying video, click here.](#)

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LifeKnowledge in Action – A–Mazing Teamwork

By Christine White, Education Specialist, LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education

Students sometimes have difficulty working with others as they form a team. This could be a member of an officer team or a team of students working on a project. The MAZE Activity is designed to have students work together as they try to discover the correct path in the maze. Along the way, the team will be rewarded with some "GOES" as they discover the correct sequence for the path while other times they will be "BEEPED" and have to start over as they hit a road block. This activity is an excellent tool to get students working together as a team.

Maze Facilitator's Guide

Goal: Get all members of your team successfully through the maze by discovering the path.

Supplies:

- A grid that is 6 boxes wide and 8 boxes long for every 8 students.
- Suggestions for creating grids:
- Create a grid on a tarp with duct tape
- Create a grid on the floor with masking or painters tape
- Create a grid on concrete using chalk.
- [To view the Maze Master Map, click here.](#)

Rules

- Everyone on the team will participate by rotating turns to navigate through the maze.
- Only one person is allowed on the maze at a time.
- No one is allowed to touch the maze surface unless traveling the path of the maze.

- The path is created by stepping on adjacent squares.
- A choice is signaled by both feet being placed in the square.
- A Maze Master will monitor the path as you walk through the maze. There are two signals you will hear from the Maze Master:
 - "GO" means you may continue traveling through the maze because you found the correct path.
 - "BEEP" means you must exit the maze by retracing your steps because you stepped on an incorrect box.
- No marking of the path or recording the succession of squares is allowed.
- Once you've discovered the path, travel in trios along the path.
- This is a timed event.
- You have 3 minutes to strategize with your team.
- The game begins with the signal, "You may begin."

Debrief – Follow-up Questions

- What happened? What did you experience?
 - What was it like to hear "GO"?
 - What was it like to hear "BEEP"?
- What did you learn?
 - Failure is only feedback
 - Interdependence
- How can you apply this to...?
 - Playing as a team
 - The activity we are working on.

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Small Group Discussion Strategy

Taken from "Project CRISS – Creating Independence through Student–Owned Strategies" by Carol M. Santa, Ph.D., Lynn T. Havens, Bonnie J. Valdes

Carousel Brainstorming

Carousel Brainstorming is a cooperative learning activity that involves students brainstorming in small groups. It can be used to bring out background knowledge and for review.

Introduction, Modeling and Reflection

1. Pick about five related topics or concepts to determine your students' background knowledge. Write each topic on one piece of flip chart paper (at the top). Number the topics (1 through 5) and post them in order around your room.
2. Assign each student a number from one to five, then have all students move to the paper and labeled with their assigned number. Give each group a different colored marker to record their information.
3. Give the groups about one minute to write on the flip chart paper everything they know or have learned about the topic. If they are not sure about their information, they can write a "?" by it.
4. After one minute, the groups move to the topic with the next higher number (group 1 goes to topic 2, etc., and group 5 goes to topic 1). At the next topic, they read what the other groups have written, make corrections or additions and add any new information they know. As they move to each station, you might want to add a little more time for reading the preceding entries. All writing should be with their original colored marker (e.g., all of group 1's entries on the topics are in red).
5. Continue this process until each group is back to its original number. After students have read what the other groups added to that topic, they move back to their seats, reading what has been added after their entry to each of the other four topics.
6. Have students reflect on what they have learned. Do they have questions of the other groups? Do they see connection between the topics? What else would they like to know? How did this strategy help them determine what they knew and did not know about the topic?

Support and Extensions

- Rather than having students write freely about their understanding of the concept, ask them to write a one-sentence summary over what they think is the most important information about each topic. Follow the same carousel procedure until each group has added a summary sentence to the charts.

- Ask students to plan their own carousel brainstorming review. They determine the key topics, write them on the charts, and organize the groups.

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We Want Your LifeKnowledge Success Stories

Do you have a success story for LifeKnowledge in your school? How are you using LifeKnowledge strategies to teach leadership to all students? What changes is LifeKnowledge making to your teaching style or the learning environment in your classroom? We'd like to know so we can share your success with other agricultural education teachers across the country. Contact Christine White at cwhite@ffa.org or call her at 317-802-4212.

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