



**MAY 2006**

**LifeKnowledge<sup>®</sup>  
At Work**

*To advance the integration of LifeKnowledge through local teachers.*

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**JOHN DEERE**



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## Introducing the new LifeKnowledge Newsletter

This e-mail launches the first issue of LifeKnowledge AT WORK, a product 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

### Industry's Need for LifeKnowledge

Senior Vice President Douglas DeVries of John Deere explains how he sees LifeKnowledge making the connection between education and experiential learning. DeVries cites specific examples of how LifeKnowledge prepares students for agricultural careers. [Click here to read article](#)

### Five Steps to Integrate LifeKnowledge Into Your Program

Nebraska agriculture teacher Matt Kreifels provides five steps on how you can more easily integrate LifeKnowledge into your program. He also shares some positive results from using LK principles in his classroom. [Click here to read article](#)

### The New Face of Agricultural Education

Ann Benson, former director of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, shares her thoughts on how agricultural education has changed and where it is going. [Click here to read article](#)

## Featured Precept

### Continuous Improvement

Take a look at how the LifeKnowledge precept of "Continuous Improvement" can be taught in your classroom, in FFA and in an SAE. From the awareness level to mastery level, here's applicable information about "Continuous Improvement." [Click here to read article](#)

## Best Practices – Integrating the Precept of "Continuous Improvement" In Your Agricultural Education Classes

J.D. Cant, an agriculture teacher from Oregon, provides insight and strategies for integrating the precept of "Continuous Improvement" into your ag ed classes. [Click here to read article](#)

## Ask The Expert

### Articulating the Value of LifeKnowledge to Your School Administrator

High school principal Kurt Dillon shares his thoughts on LifeKnowledge – how it has influenced his career, how it improves teaching and reasons why it is different from other teaching methods.

[Click here to read article](#)

## Hot Tips

### Orchestrating Classroom Success

Wondering why certain classroom activities didn't have the impact you expected? Check out how a few tweaks and adjustments to the everyday classroom method of direction-giving can totally change the outcomes in your classroom.

[Click here to read article](#)

## LifeKnowledge News

### What's New with LK

- LifeKnowledge AT WORK e-newsletter and new LifeKnowledge website debut with this issue.

- Chevrolet and Cargill announced as new Founding Partners.

[Click here to read article](#)

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## Sponsor Recognition

### Monsanto – Investment in Future Employees

Monsanto sees benefits from LifeKnowledge bringing leadership training into the classroom and providing teaching methodology that will help nearly all students develop their leadership skills. [Click here to read article](#)

## Industry's Need for LifeKnowledge

**By Douglas DeVries, Senior Vice President, Worldwide Marketing, Worldwide Agricultural Equipment Division, John Deere, and Chairman, National FFA Foundation Sponsors' Board.**



When I am asked why John Deere supports LifeKnowledge® as a founding partner, the answer is simple. LifeKnowledge connects educational and experiential learning while developing the leadership and team-oriented skills demanded by our global industry.

As a company, we have been longtime supporters of FFA. However, we also felt there was potential to develop leadership skills among all FFA members and agricultural students, not just the few who attended leadership conferences. Thus, we were immediately intrigued when we heard about LifeKnowledge. Here is a curriculum that enables FFA to foster leadership development across a larger cross-section of young people, while enabling us as an industry to support this logical expansion of agricultural education to meet future workforce requirements. The latter is very significant as our ability to compete on a global scale relies on education that supports the ability of future employees to apply knowledge in practical circumstances and in a team environment. We

need people who can think; people who can lead; and people who can work as part of a team – all skills addressed by LifeKnowledge.

I have always felt managers are easy to find, but leaders are not. I also believe that anyone can be taught technical knowledge, but not everyone can apply it. With LifeKnowledge, learning and leadership development go hand-in-hand. I appreciate how lessons are adaptable so that the subject matter can be taught while seamlessly integrating experiential material on leadership and teamwork. In this way, LifeKnowledge has much larger implications because it applies to any subject, not just those within the realm of agricultural education. Suddenly, as a result, leadership becomes part of the lesson plan without students realizing it. This transparency is the beauty of LifeKnowledge. Students are developing skills that transform them into well-rounded individuals, which carries over in their school, communities and someday, the workplace.

*"We need people who can think; people who can lead; and people who can work as part of a team – all skills addressed by LifeKnowledge"*

The challenge to all of us is to support educational experiences like LifeKnowledge that develop competitive skill sets that address the globalization of agriculture. No longer is the workplace about competing company from company, or state to state. It is now about competing globally, and in my mind agriculture is the most global of businesses. As we develop leadership and team-oriented skills in young people, we are creating an entirely different capability...the capability to not only succeed, but to thrive in a global environment. Programs such as LifeKnowledge are addressing that challenge and John Deere is proud to support it. My best to all of you – the teachers – who make this program a reality!

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## Five Steps to Integrate LifeKnowledge Into Your Program

**By Matt Kreifels, Agriculture Teacher, Blair High School, Blair, Nebraska**



As many of you already know, integrating LifeKnowledge (LK) into your lessons can have a positive influence on your students and you as a teacher. I've been part of the LK process since the initial writing stages, and there are three primary reasons why I am a big believer in this program. First, it provides great content for developing premier leadership, personal growth and career success – our goal as ag teachers. Secondly, it enables us to approach lessons with a strategy made possible by "e-moments" like "go-get-it" moments and other valuable teaching techniques. And thirdly, it engages students by combining life and career lessons with the technical content we teach in our classes. True leadership development must happen on a daily basis, for all students. But, despite the many positive attributes, the reality for us as teachers is that it requires some time (that we oftentimes don't have) to integrate LK into our classroom.

To make the process easier, I've broken down my strategy for integrating LK into five basic steps. If you are new to LK or having trouble finding the time to integrate it, hopefully these steps will

give you an idea of some of the things you can do to simplify the integration process.

1. Spend a few hours reviewing the LK CD and become familiar with the lessons and how they work. Understanding the format is half the battle.

2. Think about your current lesson plans and where you can apply LK principles. The integration tool on the LK CD will help you. For example, when talking about electricity and the tools used in wiring, have students compare those tools with utensils used at a restaurant. How are they alike? How are they different?
3. Be dedicated and intentional about integrating LK. During your daily or weekly review of lesson plans, be mindful of how you can use it within a lesson or new unit. For example, during a unit on sales, incorporate activities related to communication.
4. Integrate LK into your lessons a minimum of two days a week so that it becomes routine. If we're doing our job, it becomes transparent to students.
5. Believe in the principles of LK and don't be afraid to use them. Try it out on different classes. Some things may work and some may not, but that's part of the process. Plus, you are modeling risk for your students by showing them that you're not afraid to take a risk and try something new.

For me, integrating LK has resulted in a positive classroom change and noticeable results. Not only has it helped my students, but it has helped me as a teacher.

Change in my students – I've noticed that LK inspires ownership among my students inside and outside the classroom. One example is the national convention planning that my chapter officers undertook without my suggesting it. They came up with the idea to handle all the logistics for attending convention including meals, tours and recreation, hotels and registration. With very little guidance from me, they did it all and very well. Another example is our human relations or ag leadership class. This class has the highest number of non-FFA members because of the practical application of LK to any career, not just agriculture. Overall, I've noticed grades have improved, especially among students who are kinesthetic learners. They are engaged in the content and learning is more natural and relevant for them.

Change in myself – As a teacher, I am re-energized and motivated. It has become routine for me to integrate LK principles into my lessons several times a week. I feel like I'm teaching to every student, which is my most important objective as a teacher. This has resulted in growth of 20 percent in our agriculture department. Because of this growth, the human relations course I am teaching this year will now be taught by an English teacher so that I can fill in for additional ag classes. This teacher is going to continue using LK because she also believes in the program and understands that it's a better way of teaching.

### *The Five Steps to Integrate LK*

1. Review the LK CD.
2. Think how you can apply LK principles to existing technical lesson plans.
3. Be intentional about integrating LifeKnowledge.
4. Get into the routine of integrating LK into your lessons a minimum of two days a week.
5. Believe in the principles of LK and don't be afraid to use them.

I think you'll find the time and effort spent integrating LK into your classroom is well worth it. Once you get the hang of it, you'll find that "LifeKnowledgeing" your lessons happens in no time at all. All I have to do is look at the progress of my students and how much I enjoy being in the classroom every day, and I know LK is making a difference.

*Matt has been involved in the writing and integration of LifeKnowledge since 2002. He also participated in the 2005 Delta Conference.*

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## The New Face of Agricultural Education

**By Ann Benson, Former Director of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education**



While attending the Delta Conference last summer, I was blown away. I have never seen such a motivated and talented group of teachers in one place. It served as a reminder to me that when agriculture teachers make up their minds about something, it's best just to get out of the way and let them do their jobs! Seeing teachers take the cross-curricular concepts and teaching strategies of LifeKnowledge® and turn them into applicable, relevant lessons was inspiring. Even more inspiring was the fact that these teachers were about to take what they learned at Delta and pass it along to their students as well as other teachers.

What was observed at Delta is where agricultural education needs to be. We have entered an era where high-level instruction that integrates science and other academic bases in agricultural education is not only important, it is essential. With ongoing education reform, it is also essential that this instruction focus on raising academic achievement while giving students a more thorough approach to learning about career technical areas. Career and technical education is for all students for all careers. It's no longer about helping a few students prepare for a few jobs.

The 16 career clusters and 81 pathways have paved the way for developing the mind-set needed for career and technical education programs to succeed. The seven pathways within agricultural education – animal systems; power, structural and technical systems; plant systems; food products and processing systems; business systems; environmental service systems; and natural resource systems – serve as an important step in between agricultural careers as a whole and a specific career. Using this approach, students can think more broadly about agricultural careers and what is available to them. At the same time, it helps you structure

*"We have entered an era where high-level instruction that integrates science and other academic bases in agricultural education is not only important, **it is essential.**"*

your content so that you give students a strong academic base while helping them understand the role of these career pathways in agriculture, the world's most important industry.

"Agriculture education ranked toward the bottom of all career and technical programs in several categories including reading, mathematics, science and most surprisingly, work based learning experiences."

This is especially important as agricultural education has been criticized for lacking a strong academic and career base. According to a 2004 study by High Schools That Work (HSTW), agriculture ranked toward the bottom of all career and technical programs in several categories including reading, mathematics, science and, most surprisingly, work-based learning experiences. This study is proof that old-fashioned agriculture programs are not going to work and will be squeezed out of our educational system. Agriculture teachers must increase their role in educating the whole student by incorporating a stronger academic base as well as incorporating the career pathways.

It all comes back to the three-legged stool of agricultural education, SAE and FFA. We need all three, in balance, to make it work. And we need to ensure all three remain relevant to the educational and career demands of today. A few

recommendations:

- Make sure each SAE relates to the student's career interests and aspirations, and be sure that students know these experiences are supposed to relate to the world of work;
- Link ag ed instruction and FFA activities to a career theme;
- Help all students see the relevance of agriculture in today's world;
- Link instruction to careers and postsecondary education (What will your students need in 10-15 years?);
- Set high expectations and make ag ed programs more intellectually demanding;
- Promote leadership;
- Reach out to your academic counterparts;
- Focus on how you teach; and
- Remember your strengths.

You are in the position to shape students' lives. We saw it with our son. He makes his living in agribusiness and it's because of his experiences in agriculture and FFA. Use your talents, take advantage of teaching strategies such as LifeKnowledge® and utilize the career pathways. As is the case with agriculture teachers, once you make up your mind, there's no stopping you!

*Ann has assisted FFA, the National Association of Agricultural Educators, the Southern Regional Education Board and other organizations in the areas of career and technical education and curriculum development. Ann's husband is a retired agriculture instructor and her son was an agriculture student.*

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## Continuous Improvement

**By Doug Kueker, Education Specialist – Research, Development and Sponsored Programs Division**

### What it is...

Kaizen. That's the Japanese term for continuous improvement. Though some of the meaning is lost in translation, the essence of Kaizen suggests that all things, including people, are not on their way to a destination; rather, they are always in a state of continual improvement. The idea is that even when we reach a "destination," we often find that we've only opened up a whole host of new opportunities for improvement. Said another way, "Go as far as you can, and when you get there you'll see even further."

Continuous improvement is a key to practicing premier leadership. Stephen R. Covey, in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, introduces the concept of sharpening the saw. The idea is this: using a saw to cut wood daily will eventually dull the blades and decrease the effectiveness of the saw. Sharpening the saw gives the tool new life and increases its productivity, effectiveness and efficiency. Leaders must sharpen the saw in order to stay effective. For student leaders, this may mean having and enacting a plan for personal growth, seeking mentoring from others, adding to an arsenal of problem-solving strategies and staying current so that we can adapt with new technologies. To prepare young people for influencing in a continually changing world, we must prepare leaders who practice the skills associated with continuous improvement.

The National FFA Organization associates five skills with continuous improvement:

- Implement a leadership and personal growth plan.
- Seek mentoring from others.
- Use innovative problem-solving strategies.

### *Five Skills with Continuous Improvement*

- 1. Implement a leadership and personal growth plan.*
- 2. Seek mentoring from others.*
- 3. Use innovative problem solving strategies.*
- 4. Adapt to emerging technologies.*
- 5. Acquire new knowledge.*

- Adapt to emerging technologies.
- Acquire new knowledge.

### Noticing skill in continuous improvement...

Let's take a look at a sampling of the different behaviors you may notice with students as they work on developing mastery of the skills associated with continuous improvement.

*Students with an awareness of the skills associated with continuous improvement should be able to...*

- Explain why they need to have a personal growth plan.
- Define a mentor's role and explain how a mentor may contribute to personal improvement.
- Identify new technologies and knowledge that may improve their leadership.

*Students who currently interact with the skills associated with continuous improvement should be able to...*

- Develop and enact a personal growth plan.
- Identify a person to be their mentor and set up a regular time to meet with that person.
- Demonstrate how to solve a problem in a new and innovative way.

*Students who have mastered the skills associated with continuous improvement should be able to...*

- Evaluate their leadership and personal growth plan and make changes as necessary.
- Analyze and apply mentor's advice.
- Mentor other students.

### Incorporating Continuous Improvement into Your Program

**FFA** – Work with students to identify what they want to get out of their involvement in FFA. Then have them work backwards with each of these goals - identifying opportunities offered through participation in FFA events that will help them achieve these goals. Have students review and revise this plan once a quarter.

**SAE** – Set up a meeting with students once a quarter to evaluate progress on goals they've set with their SAE. Have them explain what they've done during the quarter and probe to have them evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

**Classroom** – Have students do some research on a how a company, local producer or organization in the community practices continuous improvement. Have the class share their findings and analyze them to identify common practices in the agricultural community. As a final project, have the class synthesize a presentation to share how continuous improvement influences agriculture locally.

**Community** – Have students interview a community leader or family member to gain a better understanding of the role continuous improvement plays in his or her personal and professional life. Have students present their interviews during class.

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## Best Practices – Integrating the Precept of "Continuous Improvement" In Your Ag Ed Classes

By Jim "J.D." Cant, Agriculture Teacher, Imbler High School, Imbler, Oregon



The precept of "Continuous Improvement" represents the protocol I try to instill in my program on a daily basis. Sometimes it's hard for us and our students to accept the idea that we will never be perfect and that challenges in life, even from one generation to the next, will hopefully make us and our lives better. That could mean economic improvements in a family through formal education and training, or by simply being a better neighbor. Regardless, we need to understand that all tasks we desire to accomplish can only be done one step at a time. This is especially hard to instill in a student culture that can be compared to fast food or a microwave-instant! In my classes, I try to slow my students down so they realize that improving their lives takes some reflection, planning and continuous improvement to reach those aspirations. Two ways I do this are through the implementation of written essays and use of the Japanese methodology of "Kaizen."

Having students write essays is a cross-curricular exercise that in and of itself teaches continuous process improvement. Every three weeks, students are assigned four new essay questions based on one of the 16 LifeKnowledge precepts. They must complete each essay outside of class time and it must be one and a half pages in length. I use the precept poster series from National FFA to develop questions. I grade them on technical writing skills and creativity. We save essays in personal notebooks so that students can refer to them throughout the year and from year to year to see how their writing skills and thought process have improved. Eventually, I would like to incorporate a 5-10 minute interview where I talk to students individually about their writings. Through this exercise, students are able to practice their writing skills, gain a thorough understanding of the precept and at

*"Every three weeks, students are assigned four new essay questions based on one of the 16 LifeKnowledge precepts."*



the same time dig into their lives and evaluate the path they are currently on. As a teacher, I also learn more about them , which helps me significantly.

Specific to the essay on process improvement, my questions included the following: 1) Are you planning your growth? 2) Do you have mentors? 3) Can you solve problems as they arise? 4) Why will continuous improvement be necessary when you lead others? Through this essay, I found out that many students don't completely understand what a mentor is, which led to a class discussion where all students identified some sort of mentor. This created a secondary opportunity whereby a student may go to that person in the future and ask for assistance. These types of discoveries happen each time we do this exercise. It even works well for my students who have IEPs and for nontraditional students who have no experience in agriculture.

**"The most important thing to remember regardless of how you choose implement this precept is that we must prove the legitimacy and usefulness of agricultural education, not as an elective class, but as an integral part of a student's education."**

The Japanese word Kaizen means small, seemingly insignificant, never-ending improvement. By using this term as our credo for the chapter officer team, SAE programs and FFA activities, students are subtly reminded that progress, no matter how insignificant, is important. The emphasis is that we can always do things a little bit better than we did before. My officer team views themselves as making things better for the officer team that follows. This year we saw considerable improvement in our application for the National Chapter Award program. Every year, we tweak and refine the application. At the state convention in March, we earned Gold Chapter status and will be moving on to the national level. In SAE, our students are required to have a project that grows and develops over the years. Quality SAEs easily translate into suitable state degree candidates. Since 2002, our chapter has had 29 state degree recipients, mainly attributed to continuous improvement and pride in personal experiences. Instilling the mind-set of improvement through small steps also keeps kids from feeling overwhelmed. Otherwise it's like trying to get them to

drink water from a fire hydrant – a little overpowering.

The most important thing to remember regardless of how you choose to implement this precept is that we must prove the legitimacy and usefulness of agricultural education, not just as an elective class, but as an integral part of a student's education. Keeping students engaged and helping them understand how they can grow inside and outside of class time validates continuous improvement.

*J.D. was a pilot teacher for LK and attended the Delta Conference in 2005. He teaches at a small school where more than 80 percent of the student body is enrolled in agriculture courses, equating to more than 100 students.*

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## Monsanto – Investment in Future Employees

For more than 50 years, Monsanto has been a supporter of agricultural education and the National FFA Organization. Monsanto, based in St. Louis, Mo., is a Founding Partner of The LifeKnowledge® Center for Agricultural Education. The company's \$500,000 contribution will be used to enhance and support this life-changing, innovative program developed by FFA.

Not only does Monsanto support FFA financially, Glenn Stith, vice president of U.S. branded business for Monsanto, is a former FFA member and is the 2007 chairman-elect of the National FFA Foundation Sponsors' Board. As a former Kentucky FFA president, Stith is passionate about the benefits LifeKnowledge offers agriculture students.



Glenn Stith  
vice president of U.S.  
branded business for  
Monsanto.

"Even though FFA was a great organization when I was in it, it was disappointing that only about 20 percent of FFA members got the opportunity to fully develop their leadership skills," Stith explains. "LifeKnowledge is outstanding because it brings leadership training into the classroom and uses teaching methodology that will provide leadership skills training to all agricultural education students."

Companies such as Monsanto, which is 100 percent dedicated to agriculture, need employees with solid leadership skills. Ensuring a bigger pipeline of employees to draw on is one reason Monsanto is a Founding Partner of LifeKnowledge.

"With LifeKnowledge in place across the country, there will be more highly skilled employees that are able to handle a greater level of responsibility earlier in their careers," Stith adds. "Some of our finest employees have come out of the FFA program. Because we are totally ag focused and many of these students are the sons and daughters of our customers, we have a strong commitment to support ag youth organizations."

"Monsanto and many other companies in agriculture need employees with good leadership skills. Down the road, LifeKnowledge will help feed the huge demand for employees within agriculture," Stith says.

Originally founded in 1901, Monsanto employs more than 13,700 in 46 different countries worldwide. Monsanto produces leading seed brands, including DEKALB and Asgrow, and provides seed partners with biotechnology traits for insect protection and herbicide tolerance. Monsanto is most known for Roundup®, the world's best-selling herbicide, and other crop protection products. The company is committed to helping the agricultural industry by developing innovative solutions in plant biotechnology, genomics and plant breeding.

Monsanto's mission is to provide creative new solutions for farmers and their crops. But Monsanto employees believe it also is important to invest in the future. By contributing to the LifeKnowledge program, the company believes it will enhance the quality of young people, preparing them to lead the agricultural industry in new directions.

*"Monsanto and many other companies in agriculture need employees with good leadership skills. Down the road, LifeKnowledge will help feed the huge demand for employees within agriculture."*

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## Ask the Expert – Articulating the Value of LifeKnowledge to Your School Administrator

### Q&A with Kurt Dillon, Principal, Rawlins County High School, Atwood, Kansas

#### Q: How has being a part of the LK process influenced your career in education?

A: LK is one of the reasons I decided to become a principal. I wanted to "spread the word" about the basic building blocks of the LK system, namely better direction giving, brain-based learning, student-centered classrooms and real-life applications and connections. LK had such an impact on my teaching experience that I would like to see all of my teachers using the methods and techniques LK brings to the classroom. It creates an environment where teachers become better teachers and students become better students.



Kurt Dillon, Principal, Rawlins County High School, Atwood, Kansas

#### Q: How does LK improve a teacher's ability to teach?

A: Teachers sometimes forget the importance of connecting what is learned in a lesson to students' lives. LK helps develop those connections and encourages teachers to build relevance into their lessons. Personally, LK helped me to better organize my lessons by providing a basis for lesson design. It also helped me create lessons that held my students' attention and helped them retain content. Implementing LK took a change of attitude on my part, but once my students and I adjusted to the change, I was on top of my lessons, students were more engaged and the class as a whole operated more efficiently.

#### Q: With so many learning styles in a classroom, how can LK influence every student?

A: LK is different from other teaching styles in that it is designed to reach out to all learners, no matter what their learning style. It incorporates the latest neuroscience and brain-based research methods of learning while promoting life skills such as critical thinking,

*"LK is different from other teaching styles in that it is designed to reach out to all learners, no matter what their learning style."*

diversity, civic engagement and service. The overall impact of LK on the school and community may not be felt until students have been exposed to the LK system for three to four years during high school. But, the individual impact on each student can be witnessed on a daily basis with improved class participation and retention of both leadership and technical content.

#### Q: What is the best way to help my principal understand the value of LK?

A: The best way to help a principal (or anyone for that matter) understand the value and essence of LK is to demonstrate the techniques in your classroom. Use it every day and believe in the system. It is hard to change a teaching style; hard to change "the way we have always done it"; hard to be creative. But implementing LK on a consistent basis is important because that is the only way to get results. Invite your principal into your classroom to see students become engaged learners and you, their teacher, connect learning to their lives. It is also important to note that with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), LK brings the relevance and relationships touted in today's educational reform into the classroom.

#### Q: What sets LK apart from other teaching methods?

A. There are five main reasons why LK is unique. 1) LK is NOT just a set of packaged lessons. It is a teaching style and format that is cross-curricular and applies to all students. 2) Learning the LK system and techniques will rejuvenate a teacher and a classroom. 3) Using LK will reduce classroom management problems and engage all students. 4) LK can help an agriculture department and FFA chapter retain students and develop better student leaders. 5) LK is applicable to all areas of an agriculture department curriculum, and the 16 precepts of LK have been validated by agricultural industry leaders. You are teaching your students skills that industry leaders have said they need in future employees.

*Prior to becoming principal, Kurt taught agriculture at Rawlins County High School for 19 years. He was part of the pilot group for the LifeKnowledge lessons, and used LK in the classroom for the past three years.*

If you have a question that you want to ask a LifeKnowledge expert, [you may submit it here](#). Answers will be found in future issues of the *LifeKnowledge AT WORK* newsletter. Please note that not every question may be answered.

# Orchestrating Classroom Success – The Power of Effective Directions

By Andy Armbruster, Education Specialist – LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education

It happens daily in our classrooms. Experiments fall to pieces because of this action. Shop projects wind up having crucial components missing because of this haphazard. Students end up telling someone that photosynthesis is the man-made process of making sausage. What is this disease that becomes our worst enemy in classes we teach where we think we are most prepared? Bad directions! Directions can make or break an entire class period.

The following principles have been adapted from the book Quantum Teaching by Mark Reardon, Bobbi DePorter and Sarah Singer-Nourie. These few, easily integrated strategies can make a major impact in our classrooms.

*"Directions can make or break an entire class period."*

- Use Go Words and Go Phrases
- Use Action Words
- Provide a Specific Time
- Check for Clarity if Complex

Bad directions often sound like the following:

"All right, class. We're going to head to the shop. Wait! Wait! Don't get up yet. I didn't tell you to leave. You're gonna want to get a piece of angel iron and go over to the plasma cutter. But be sure to grab your safety goggles and put on your coveralls first. Excuse me? Oh...one-by-one-inch angel iron. Jim, sit down! There are still a few more things I need to tell you. Mike, I didn't say to start putting on your coveralls."

Been there? What do you think the students would do if your directions sounded like this?:

- In a moment, when you hear the phrase "Head to the shop" – but not until you hear that phrase (go word/go phrase)...
- Grab your safety glasses (begins with action word)...
- Put on your coveralls (begins with action word)...
- Grab a piece of one-by-one-inch angel iron (begins with action word)...
- And head to the plasma cutter (begins with action word).
- We'll have two minutes to make this happen (provides specific time).
- What questions do you have? (checks for clarity)

This approach is guided by a philosophy that you could easily call "Mind before Body." These are teenagers we're working with. It's second nature for them to want to move, so when we ask them to move, they're gone – and we're left trying to herd cats! The key to all of this is the go word/go phrase. This allows us the chance to truly orchestrate an activity.

- When you hear the phrase "Head to the shop..."
- When you hear me say "Bam, let's kick it up a notch...."
- When we hear the words "Let's get with it..."

These are just a few go phrases that create curiosity, anticipation and, more importantly, provide deliberative mobilization of your students.

The reason for the action words, also known as verbs, is that they are kinesthetic. When we provide directions for students, we're mobilizing them to take action. Using action words in our directions provides clarity in the steps students need to take and clearly outlines the actions.

How many times have you gotten knee-deep into an activity with students when all of a sudden you hear a couple of them say, "What are we supposed to do?" or "How much time do we have?" By simply asking the students what questions they have before starting the activity and by providing them with a specific time, this situation can be eliminated. A time limit also provides an opportunity to keep the students focused and on task.

Take a look at a few more examples of effective directions:

- When you hear the phrase "Let's roll!"...
- Grab your record books.
- Jump to the leadership inventory tab.
- Write down four leadership activities you have attended in the past two weeks.
- This should take about three minutes.
- Questions?
- "Let's roll!"

Here's another:



- When the words "Teach me oh wise one" are stated...
- Pull out your sketches that represent photosynthesis.
- Find a partner.
- Ask your partner to share his or her interpretation of their drawing.
- Reciprocate.
- Then wait for further instructions.
- This entire activity should take three minutes and 44 seconds.
- Who has questions?
- "Teach me oh wise one."

Shifting our directions to this type of format can be challenging, particularly because poor directions are consistently modeled. Taking the small step to improve our directions will have profound impact on classroom activities, classroom management and, most importantly, student engagement.

Start with an easy set. If necessary, write the directions on an index card. What's so bad about having your students see you use an index card in class? Most won't notice it, and if they do, they might actually appreciate the fact that you're trying to improve as a teacher.

One more set – this time for you, the teacher:

- When you get to class in the morning...
- Identify a set of directions you'll be giving during the day.
- Write those directions (using go words and action words) on a note card.
- It will take you about three minutes to complete the directions.
- Questions?
- Enjoy the results!

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## What's New with LK

### *LifeKnowledge AT WORK* E-Newsletter Debuts

A brand-new, monthly e-newsletter packed with news and information is now available. Learn the latest LifeKnowledge news including:

- How LifeKnowledge is being put to use across the country
- Unique ways to use LifeKnowledge lessons
- Ways LifeKnowledge can help you in your career as an educator
- What's coming from the LifeKnowledge Center

### New LifeKnowledge Website Now Available

Take a look at our new LifeKnowledge website at <http://www.ffa.org/ageducators/lifeknowledge/index.html>. It's more comprehensive than our former site, and contains more timely information. Additional features and educator tools will be added in the following weeks so be sure to visit often for updates. The LK website will also allow you to access current and past issues of the LifeKnowledge at Work newsletter.

### LifeKnowledge Center Introduced to Ag Industry

The National FFA Organization officially introduced the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education to the agricultural industry and recognized the collaborative efforts and substantial support of the LifeKnowledge Center's five Founding Partners during the 2006 Commodity Classic in Anaheim, Calif.

### Chevrolet and Cargill are New Founding Partners

Welcome to the Center's two newest Founding Partners, Chevrolet and Cargill. Each company's recent commitment of \$500,000 to the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education is greatly appreciated.

### Become a LifeKnowledge Writer

This is your opportunity to become intimately involved with LifeKnowledge through a new Coaching Design project.

The National FFA Organization is looking for 25 educators with strong talents in helping young people grow as leaders. These individuals will serve as writers for a new LifeKnowledge Teacher Coaching Guide. Writers will create turn-key coaching feedback teachers can use to help students develop their leadership and personal growth skills. The meeting is

June 21 – 26, 2006, in Indianapolis. If you're interested in this project, contact Kim Henry, [khenry@ffa.org](mailto:khenry@ffa.org) or 317-802-4362, for an application.

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