



Team of Experts

expert (ĕks' pûrt), n. An expert or experienced person; hence, one who has special skill or knowledge in a subject; a specialist. — *Webster's New International Dictionary*

Farm families should have their own experts—a team of experts. A team of experts is a group of people, individuals, organizations, or businesses that possess important skills or information to help farmers in needed times. Why have a team of experts?

Case of Peter G.

Peter, in his mid 40's, was a highly successful farmer. He farmed over 2,000 acres, was active in farm organizations, and served on the school board. He was married to Joan. They have five children ranging from 15 to 4 years of age.

On her way home from town one afternoon, Joan was killed suddenly in a head-on collision. After recovering from the initial shock, Peter was in need of a team of experts.

Who will care for the children? Are there services for housekeeping? What help is there for single parents? Who does Peter talk to about losing a spouse?

Regain Strength

One of the functions of a team of experts is to provide emotional support during times of high stress. During such times you may function at very low levels. This may be because of depression, the energy it takes to cope with a crisis, or overload of decisions. A good team of

experts can provide support, take the load off, and help you return to normal.

In Peter's case, his family, Homemaker Services, a mental health center, a day care center, Parents Without Partners, and other groups would be on his team of experts.

Case of Joyce and Ted T.

Joyce was born on the farm but after marrying Ted they moved to the east coast. After spending 25 years in the "rat race of big city living" they are moving back to the country to take over the family farm.

Joyce and Ted need a team of experts.

Gain New Skills

A somewhat different function of a team of experts is to assist in developing new skills. What are needed here are persons who can challenge, teach new skills, serve as role models, and provide emotional help during times when you feel awkward or insecure while learning new skills.

Members of Joyce and Ted's team might be neighbors, agri-business dealers, farm business associations, Extension service, community colleges, and others.

Case of Jim J.

Jim, 34 years old, is a successful farmer. He farms 2,000 acres and has a knack for turning a profit even while neighbors have trouble. He has received several outstanding farmer awards. He is in

demand as a speaker on farm issues and practices.

Jim needs a team of experts.

Provide a Challenge

It's just as important to have contact with stimulating people when you are doing well in order to maintain a high level of performance. During good times it's easy to ignore suggestions from others, but support from others may keep you sharp and possibly prevent problems.

Case of Anne B.

Anne continues to live on the same farm where she grew up. She has seen a lot of changes in farming; a lot of people have come and gone in the area. She is concerned about the lack of housing and care for old people in rural areas. She would like to see a retirement center in the small community near her.

Anne needs a team of experts.

Achieve Goals

Many of the goals you try to achieve cannot be met without help and contributions from a number of people. This often requires people who have skills and resources which you do not have nor have an interest to develop. A team of experts can provide this support.

It's difficult to ask other people for help. You might feel that you are imposing. You may feel as if you are being weak or dependent on another person. That's hard when you've been taught to be self-

sufficient. It also means you need to open up to help and that you are willing to make demands on others.

The social scientist, John Cassel, has studied the value of a team of experts. He found that people who used very little support from others had more stress-related problems and took longer to recover from them. Successful people were more likely to seek and use assistance from others. They knew how valuable a team of experts could be.

Different Types of Experts

Members in a team of experts should provide various kinds of help depending on the situation. The following list points out different functions a team of expert members might serve.

- **Helpers**—people who are needed in times of crisis. These people are experts in solving particular problems that occur during high stress times. These experts provide counsel.
- **Idols**—people who are respected because of their success. Idols show what is possible in a certain job and also the opportunities and problems of a given role. These are experts to be copied.
- **Common Bond**—people who share the same concerns and problems can be helpful. They may help keep you motivated, be a sounding board for ideas, share work load. By grouping together they can solve difficult problems. Other farmers may fit in this category.
- **Close Friends**—people who provide security and caring. They may have similar interests or hobbies. They are especially helpful during periods of stress to provide stability. These experts can be family, relatives, neighbors.
- **Teachers**—people who have special skills that can help improve your occupation or career. Teachers may have one special skill, one piece of

information, or an abundance of ideas. These experts might be vocational agriculture teachers, researchers, or other farmers.

- **Referral Agents**—people who know the community and organizations. They can connect you to those places where help or information can be obtained. These experts may be Extension staff.
- **Special Interest**—people who have valuable resources or influence. They can provide financial support, materials, tools, skills, or guidance. Special interest experts are helpful in accomplishing large scale projects. Business and community leaders can be special interest experts.
- **Challengers**—people who question, motivate, or push you forward. They may be disagreeable, or play the devil's advocate, or be in direct competition. These experts help improve your abilities.

Team of Experts Review

A good team of experts:

- provides support and acceptance
- builds confidence and skills
- performs duties for you
- changes over time

Close friends are but one member in a team of experts. Other team members are listed in Table 1. They are not all needed at one given time but vary according to your needs. Who is on *your* team of experts? Think about the type of help you want from each team member and how much help you are receiving from them. It's not important to fill every space. Use the same person more than once if it fits.

When You Are a Team Member

It's possible that you may be a member of another farmer's team of experts. How can you be a good team member, especially to a farmer facing a crisis?

Dr. Jerry Robinson, extension specialist in sociology, University of Illinois, outlines four steps necessary in helping others cope with stress.

1. Encourage Expressing Feelings

It's important that a person under stress be allowed to vent his or her feelings. This means that you allow the person to talk, to yell, or to cry. This helps to reduce the feelings of stress temporarily so the person can take a realistic look at the problem. Facing up to the problem and getting feelings out in the open are the first steps in managing stress.

How you respond to someone feeling stressed is important. Typically, people take a "parenting" approach: advising, analyzing, judging. Responses such as "Don't get so emotional," "Try to get organized," or "It's silly to worry about it" are examples of parenting responses.

What stressed people need is someone to listen, to support, and to allow feelings to be expressed. It's helpful to ask short, neutral questions or express concern and willingness to listen, for example, "Would you like to talk about it," "You sound upset," "I can see why that would bother you."

2. Identify Causes of Stress

Sometimes a person can find the cause of stress simply by expressing feelings. Other times a person may have difficulty seeing the source of the problem and need help from others.

If you want to find the real source of a person's stress, it's important to respond in a way that helps a person talk. If you ask loaded questions, "Are you too scared to ask the landlord," you may never get to the source.

It's important to communicate an acceptance of what the person is saying. If you judge or make the person feel worse, you will only compound the problem.

3. Relieve the Pressure

If the source of stress is something that can be controlled, you can attempt to relieve the pressure. If the problem is work overload, perhaps you can help with the work. If the problem is economic, you can suggest sources of financial help. Even if the problem is not work related you may sometimes be able to relieve the pressure if you are supportive and understanding.

4. Take Action

A fourth step in helping others deal with stress is finding solutions to the problem. Sometimes the person is able to do this simply by expressing feelings. Other times, an objective viewpoint might be needed to explore alternatives.

The alternatives might be taking action to remove the stress, finding temporary outlets for recurring stressful situations, or accepting the situation for what it is and trying to live with it.

A team of experts is especially useful in coping with stress—the stress that comes from experiencing a crisis, learning new skills, or keeping your job productive. It takes skill and time to develop and utilize a team of experts. But a well chosen and helpful team may make a farmer more successful and is another way of dealing with stress.

The "When You Are A Team Member" section is adapted from *Stress In Community Groups* by Jerry Robinson, Extension Specialist in Sociology, Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, 1977.

Table 1. Your Team of Experts

Team member	Who are they	Satisfied		
		Low	Medium	High
1. Close friend	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Teacher	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Special Interest	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Referral Agent	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Challenger	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Helper	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Common Bond	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Idol	_____	_____	_____	_____

How do you use your team of experts?
 Are you happy with your team of experts?
 Are you missing an important member of your team?
 What would you like to change about your team of experts?

The text of this leaflet was written by Randy Weigel, Extension Specialist in Human Development and Family Life, Iowa State University and originally published by the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. This material has been adapted with permission.

