



## A Guide to Recruiting Program Candidates

- Guidelines
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- Readiness Factors

*We grow leaders who  
make a difference.*

**Discover how you can play an  
integral part in recruiting  
for the future...**



# Alumni Are Key to Recruiting and Preparing Candidates

By Dr. Michael W. Thomas, CALF Director of Education

You are planning to sit down with a work colleague or friend (“Karen”) whom you know well. You think she would be an excellent prospect for Ag Leadership. Karen has already looked carefully at the CALF website and read about the program. Now that you are finally having a formal meeting, what do you talk about? What can you do to find out if she is ready for Ag Leadership?

As you prepare for this meeting – and the next few meetings you may have with Karen – you are thinking a bit more deeply about what makes an excellent candidate. You realize the most important activity for alumni is the recruiting and mentoring of properly prepared recruits for potential admission into the program. The future of Ag Leadership depends on the quality of those who are selected.

During these discussions, you are trying to figure out the “why” for Karen. Why does she want to invest time in leadership development? If she emphasizes the importance of networking or how her operation could benefit from all the great Ag Leadership contacts, then Karen is not the right person. On the other hand, if she realizes that now is the time to get more involved in community and professional organizations, to take leadership (not just passive) roles, to give back, to help others in a more meaningful way than she has previously done in her limited community service, and she indicates some self-awareness and sincere desire to learn what it takes to help others, then she is likely a fitting candidate.

Some alumni are very good at finding new talent; they really seem to know who is ready for Ag Leadership. Sometimes they see potential, but know the prospect is not quite ready and needs more guidance. This “green” candidate still needs to learn a few things about themselves, and the astute alumnus realizes that the candidate needs to spend a few years preparing. The wise alumnus also realizes those who are not the right fit.

We have noticed that well-prepared new fellows – those who are ready to hit the road running at inaugural and throughout the program – are those who have been guided by a thoughtful alumnus for a period of time until the applicant is ready for the program. Only those who have been through the Ag Leadership Program know how to advise them and help determine when they are ready.

What are the characteristics of a qualified applicant? Most important is an open mind and one who has looked beyond themselves to serve others. The ideal candidate has that deep inner feeling that it is time to get more involved in an active leadership role – one who is starting to search for the new opportunity to make a difference.

## Guidelines for Recruiting a Candidate

- 1 Identify a colleague or friend in agriculture with leadership potential. The person must live in California, with strong ties to California agriculture, and is committed to stay in the state.
- 2 Discuss the program with the candidate. Find out their level of interest. Discuss the commitment of time and of making a difference to California agriculture. Do they have the support of their employer and family?
- 3 As you speak to them and continue guiding them, determine their open-mindedness, creative problem solving abilities, life experiences and overall interest in keeping agriculture alive in California. Determine why they want to be in Ag Leadership.
- 4 Help them to determine the right time for committing so much time away from work and family.
- 5 Help them with the application process.
- 6 Enlist the help of others. Take them to events and introduce them to alumni.
- 7 If this is just not right for them, don't be afraid to tell them. Recommend other programs that are a better fit.

**Ag Leadership is not for everyone. A candidate who is not self-aware or open minded will not measure up. It doesn't serve the candidate to find this out at the interview.**

Besides the leadership potential you first saw in Karen, she must also have emotional maturity, be willing to look deeply and honestly at herself, and be willing to make the changes necessary for improvement. If she has these inner qualities, she is likely an excellent candidate and we need her and many others like her from all sectors of agriculture. **Our future depends on it.**



# Recruiting: Worth the Extra Effort

By John Weiler (22)

There is no secret or magic touch to recruiting. To borrow a cliché, it is more about perspiration than inspiration.

I have had numerous alumni tell me that “they just don’t know anybody who would be a good candidate.” In my opinion, that is not a good excuse. My suggestion is to put a little more effort into it. I am constantly mentally screening people as potential candidates. Industry events, meetings and shows are good places to scout. But so are soccer games, church services, non-industry meetings, golf tournaments and other local events.

I enjoy talking with potential candidates and raising their awareness of the benefits of Ag Leadership. At the same time, I am gauging their interest, evaluating and re-evaluating them as potential candidates. I look for maturity and intelligence, but I also look for passion. To be a leader you have to have some degree of enthusiasm.

In identifying potential candidates, I first look at their track record. What have they done? Have they ever been president or chairman of anything? If I don’t see a track record, I look for potential. Some people don’t really develop as leaders until a little later and with a little encouragement and training.

I maintain a list of local potential candidates. It is a dynamic list that changes all the time. People are removed from the list when they are accepted into the program or when they fail to demonstrate interest. People are added to the list all the time. I share the list with fellow local alumni. If they know someone on the list better than I do, I try to get them involved in the recruiting process.

Finally, I organize a couple events every year. We have an annual social get together around the holidays. Alumni, family, friends and potential candidates are all welcome to attend. It is very informal and is mostly about reconnecting with other alumni.

The second event is an informational reception that has a more structured format. We try to have different alumni speakers with a variety of experiences. We usually have a recent graduate, an older participant, a spouse, and possibly an alumni with political experience. In recent years, Bob Gray has provided more of the details regarding the mechanics of the process. We then field questions in a group setting and individually.

After the reception I try to follow up with individuals who have indicated an interest in applying. Sometimes they need a nudge to get started on the application. The process can be somewhat intimidating, so a little encouragement can make a difference between procrastination and a completed application.

If a person is accepted for the phase three face-to-face interview, I try to organize a lunch with him/her and a couple of alumni. The purpose is to give the candidate an idea of what to expect and reduce some of the anxiety they might be experiencing.

*John has perhaps the best track record in recent years for recruiting candidates.*



By Joel Kimmelshue (37)

First and foremost, our business has made the Ag Leadership Program an external focal point for our staff for many reasons. I know of no other professional development and personal training program that provides what Ag Leadership does. As a result, we have had a few people go through the program\* and we are grooming candidates for future classes.

Our process isn’t an exact science, but we’ve developed a fairly consistent and successful approach:

**SELECTION:** We first carefully identify individuals with leadership characteristics, openness to other perspectives and a desire for personal development.

**EDUCATION:** We educate staff as to what Ag Leadership is and introduce them to the program (usually over more than one year) through recruitment events and other functions.

**INVESTMENT:** All along, we let the potential candidate know that if they decide to apply for the program, our firm will fully support their time away from work and necessary expenses.

**ACTION:** Once they say “yes, I really want to do this,” we sit down with each potential candidate and walk through the application and overall process in detail. We identify gaps and develop a plan (which usually takes more than a year) for that individual to achieve.

**APPLICATION:** Lastly, our staff member applies, we provide recommendations (and yes, a few pointers), and everyone keeps their fingers crossed.

It is important to note that once the person has completed the program, our firm continues to support involvement throughout their career. Why? We are convinced that supporting preparation for, attendance in, and follow up with everything that is Ag Leadership results in increased staff retention, improved morale and performance, and simply a much better person and community-focused individual.

*\*Joel (37), Mica Heilmann (40) and Stephanie Tillman (41) are the three Land IQ staff members who have gone through the program.*





# Readiness Indicators for Potential Candidates

How can you tell if a person is ready for the Ag Leadership Program? Affirmative answers to most of the following questions will serve as strong indicators that your candidate should apply to the program:

## MATURITY

*Has the candidate...*

- Had the life experience (in years and/or in life's challenges) to be ready for the program?
- Articulated personal and professional goals?
- Identified steps to achieve these goals and started the journey?
- Shown confidence (without being arrogant) in some of the skill areas needed for his/her job, while being appropriately humble about what he/she doesn't yet know?
- Successfully navigated his/her way through conflicts in the workplace?
- Taken responsibility for his/her actions?

## OPEN-MINDEDNESS

*Is the candidate...*

- Tolerant of others' views that differ greatly from his/her own?
- Curious about the beliefs and values of others?
- Able to see the merits of positions others take, even though he/she holds a different opinion?

## SELF-AWARENESS

*Is the candidate...*

- Aware of the impact he/she has on others (co-workers, family, neighbors, friends, etc.)?
- Able to talk about and learn from failure without being defensive?
- Able to honestly recognize his/her own strengths and weaknesses?

## LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

*Does the candidate...*

- Have influence on others? If so, in what way?
- Earned the respect of others? Is he/she viewed as a role model?
- Demonstrate actions that inspire others to do more?
- Rely on others to achieve results that he/she could not accomplish alone?
- Rely on more than positional authority to motivate others?
- Serve as a mentor?

## PROPENSITY TO SERVE

*Does the candidate...*

- Have a pattern of giving back to the community by volunteering?
- Serve in a leadership capacity within the industry or on a nonprofit board?
- Successfully balance work commitments, family or personal time (e.g., hobbies or travel) and volunteer activities?
- Show enough humility to assist a person in need of help or guidance?

## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE AND HORIZONS

*Is the candidate...*

- Informed about pressing national and global issues?
- Able to see connections between what happens in remote corners of the globe and California agriculture?

## LIFE/WORK TIMING

*Will the candidate...*

- Be able to get away from his/her work commitments to engage fully – given the program's time demands?
- Have an employer and spouse (if married) support the decision to be in the program?
- Be able to devote his/her full attention and energies to participate in the program and take from it all they can? (To the extent that major life events can be anticipated – e.g., starting a new job, getting married, having a child, caring for an aging parent, etc.)

## Talent Spotting

Those who have gone through Ag Leadership are the best recruiters because they have first-hand program knowledge. The recent curriculum focusing on "leadership from the inside out" has not been experienced by most of our classes, and may therefore be a bit unsettling when it comes to aligning talent with the program. There are a few constants, however, that apply to all applicants, past and present:

- A sense of "readiness" for the program (what we might have called in the past "maturity"), broadly meaning a desire to continue to grow and to develop.
- Enough life and work experience to make a solid contribution to the group learning dynamic.
- An indication of service to others and leadership potential (likely not fully developed, but expressed).
- A long-term commitment to California agriculture.

Leadership is about the future, and there is a constant and even urgent need for leadership in today's world. As alumni, you are the ones best suited to identify the next generation of talent. Thank you in advance for making a difference in the lives of others.