



## Successful projects: incentive, involvement, and a whack upside the head

**W**hen I was 16 AND ELVIS PRESLEY was at the height of his success, I worked on an apple farm. After our crop was in, work slowed down, and I had some free time. A widow down the road from where I worked had a small orchard, and she asked me if I would get some city kids (I lived in the city) to pick her orchard.

The deal was that I would hire, manage, and pay the workers, and, when I delivered the crop to the cider mill, she would pay me 20 cents per box. The catch was that I had to deliver the apples before the next freeze, or their value, along with my payment, would depreciate considerably.

I hired four guys from the neighborhood who promised that they would work hard because I offered to pay them 7 cents a box. This arrangement could work out to \$15/day, a princely sum in 1956—better pay than a week's worth of hubcap stealing. My job was to provide transportation for the crew, load the full apple boxes, and transport the apples to the cider mill.

All went well the first day until about 10 am, when the crew's newly used muscles responded with pain. A little macho laughing and joking kept us going till lunch. After lunch, the guys quit because they were sore and bored. I sweet-talked them back to work, but progress was so slow that we wouldn't finish till Christmas, and it *always* froze before Christmas in New Jersey. I had a brilliant idea: I raised the wages to 12 cents per box for what the crew picked after lunch. The crew ignored the pain, and the pick-

ing rate soared. Incentive pay was an answer to my problem.

The next day, one of the guys, Joey, started to fool around, thus slowing production. The 12-cents-per-box pay rate after lunch had become standard, so he didn't care

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how much he picked in the morning. I talked to Joey a couple of times, but he didn't care about my problem. He was willing to watch me sink as long as he had his fun and got his money. Threatening to withhold Joey's wages would precipitate rebellion, so instead, I whacked Joey a good one. This tack was a time-honored method of settling discipline problems in South Paterson, NJ. Joey straightened up and went back to work. Discipline was an answer to my problem.

The crew hit its stride, and we made good progress for a while. The weather report forecast an unexpected freeze in a couple of days, and my guys could

never pick the orchard in that time. I thought of several alternatives: I could leave the hard-to-pick fruit, whine about the sudden freeze, hire more people, quit, or pick apples myself. I could pick twice as many as these guys; with me picking, we would beat the freeze. I traded jobs with Joey, the worst picker, who extracted his price, and we beat the freeze by one night. Involvement was an answer to my problem.

I picked up the money, paid off my labor debt, and considered the lessons I had learned: Incentive, discipline, and involvement are three essential items in a successful project. (Oh yes, we did cut school to pick apples so late in the season, but in South Paterson, the authorities considered it honorable to cut school to do farm work.)

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