

# Roles and Responsibilities: “Who” Is Responsible For “What.”

By: Atina Diffley - *Quality Of Life: Tools And Systems For A Healthy Farming Partnership*

<https://atinadiffley.com/quality-of-life>

The purpose of this document is to provide a process for farms to define and designate the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved with the business.

To meet the needs of the business and the people involved:

- **Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Create a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the individuals that are involved with your farm business.
- **Define Decision-Making Responsibilities:** Establish a clear understanding of who is responsible for which decisions.
- **Create Information Sharing Systems:** Establish what information needs to be shared for the individuals to accomplish their responsibilities in a timely and efficient manner, and what system(s) will be used.

## Roles and Responsibilities

**Roles** — Roles are the positions individuals assume or the parts that they play in a particular operation or process. For example, on a farm, an individual might have the role of packingshed manager.

**Responsibilities** — Responsibilities include the specific tasks or duties that individuals are expected to complete. This person is held accountable for the completion of these duties and tasks. For example, a person in the role of packingshed manager might have responsibilities that include ordering supplies, and managing the cleaning, cooling, and packing of produce. They would also be responsible for delegation and oversight if other people do some of the work.

Having clear and agreed upon roles and responsibilities are important to the ultimate success of a farm. When clarity is not present it can cause many challenges, including: inefficiency redundancy, decision-making conflict or avoidance, time management issues, frustration, profit loss, and important areas being missed.

- For all farms, an annual evaluation and discussion of roles and responsibilities creates a process to check in on how things are going, plan improvements, allow people to change roles, and adjust to life changes and new priorities.
- For many established farms, roles and responsibilities have worked themselves out over time, but there may not have been a formal discussion. These farms are well served by evaluating their system and having an open dialogue with all responsible parties.
- For new farms figuring out how to get everything done, it is important to plan ahead and check in often.
- When there is a change in people working on the farm, it is important to evaluate what roles (both formal and informal) and responsibilities the departing person was covering. Redistribute the formal roles, and understand how the informal roles impacted the group.

### Share The Same Vision

For a partnership to be successful, all parties involved must agree on and work toward the same goals and direction. It is critical to have a clear, agreed-on comprehensive plan that accommodates the needs of all partners. If you don't have a written holistic goal, or clearly articulated goals and personal needs, you may wish to do this first, and then return to *Roles and Responsibilities*.

See *Create A Holistic Goal and Personal Needs* [atinadiffley.com/quality-of-life](https://atinadiffley.com/quality-of-life)

When working with clients on roles and responsibilities, I frequently hear both parties exclaim, “I thought you were taking care of that!”

## Formal And Informal Roles: Two Types Of Roles That Individuals Have

### Formal Roles

Formal roles are essential parts that must be filled in order to accomplish the goals of the organization. When we refer to formal roles, we are describing “who” is responsible for “what.”

### Informal Roles

Unlike formal roles, informal roles are not generally designated. Instead, they are assumed by individuals because of their personalities, style, or the way that they like to work with situations.

Informal roles may or may not be required in order to achieve the goals, but they can have an impact on the progress of the group. Sometimes informal roles can enhance the overall productivity of the team. Other times they can be negative, and if not addressed, may limit the group’s ability to function effectively. It is important to recognize their impact and manage these roles as needed. Informal roles that may be part of your operation include:

- **Informal spokesperson:** This is a person who takes responsibility for hearing everyone’s voice, synthesizing different opinions, and speaking on behalf of the group. This can be helpful if managers aren’t in close contact with workers, however it can become problematic if problems are left unresolved by creating a second tier of communication.
- **Comedian:** Comedians break tension and conflict with humor. They make sure people do not take themselves too seriously. This person may need help to ensure boundaries are clear and that jokes don’t overstep or come in at inappropriate times.
- **Catalyst:** This person is like a cheerleader. They contain the energy for the project, get people excited, and keep people moving forward. When well-harnessed, this team leader can be very effective, if not, this person can harm overall enthusiasm.
- **Optimist:** Someone who brings an upbeat perspective. This person can help keep people positive and engaged. However, this person can also gloss over problems and distract people from dealing with them.
- **Realist:** The person who conducts reality checks for the team, who wants to see the team succeed and not get blindsided by unanticipated events. A true realist is not necessarily negative and can be very helpful. Sometimes a realist is critical of other people’s ideas or wears people out with worse case scenarios.
- **Caregiver:** This person makes sure that there is harmony and everyone’s needs are being met. This can be a healthy expression of love that energizes and supports. It can also be unhealthy, rooted in control and insecurity. See side bar.

| Example: Informal roles can be positive or detrimental to the progress of your group.                              |   |
|--|---|
| Care-Giving  | Care-Taking   |
| Is a healthy expression of kindness and love. It can be learned.   | Is an unhealthy, behavior rooted in insecurity and control needs. It is learned and can be changed. |
| Re-energizes and inspires.   | Feels stressful, exhausting.  |
| Honors boundaries.   | Crosses boundaries.   |
| Caregivers practice self-care because it enables them to be of service to others.                                  | Caretakers don’t practice self-care because they believe it is a selfish act.                       |
| Caregivers take action and solve problems.   | Caretakers worry.   |
| Caregivers only know what’s best for themselves.   | Caretakers think they know what’s best for others.  |
| Caregivers trust others enough to support them to activate their own problem solving capabilities.                 | Caretakers don’t trust others’ abilities to care for themselves.                                    |
| Caregivers empathize, letting the other person know they are supported and lovingly ask, “What do you want to do.” | Caretakers start fixing when a problem arises for someone else.                                     |

## Role Expectations

Regardless of the situation, each of the individuals will have desires and beliefs about what they want to be doing, what decisions they want to make, and areas they want to oversee. Individuals will also have beliefs about what the other members of the team could or should be doing. These beliefs are referred to as role expectations. It is very important to discuss them to minimize misunderstandings between what individuals expect of one another, and what individuals perceive their own roles to be.

### TO DO:

#### **Activity #1. Identify Important Responsibilities**

The first step will be to identify the specific tasks or duties that must be done for your farm to accomplish your goals.

Brainstorm an extensive list of the “Important Responsibilities” specific to your operation. Consider all areas of your farming operation that are necessary for your success. It may be helpful to start by going through your operations by seasons. For example: winter planning, purchasing of supplies, CSA recruitment and so on. Use the seasons to ensure you don’t overlook any key duties or tasks.

- a. If your farming partnership(s) impacts a family or a personal relationship, include roles and responsibilities that need to be filled for your farm and personal relationship to function well (i.e. housekeeping, meal planning, childcare, family or social obligations.)
- b. If your work plan includes other people—hired service providers, employees, family members, or a landlord with responsibilities—include any/all responsibilities that need to be filled by them for your partnership and farm to function well.

Using small post-it notes, write one *Important Responsibility* per note.

- Set a minimum goal of 50 or more. There can be 100s!
- Temporarily suspend judgment and evaluation.
- Just capture the ideas. No discussion or editing at this point.

***Below are some examples to stimulate your thinking. Be specific to your operation.***

- Paying bills
- Writing newsletters for CSA
- Bookkeeping
- Financial planning
- Fertility and soil management
- Primary tillage
- House cleaning
- Equipment acquisition and maintenance
- Field Planting
- Weed management
- Pest and disease management
- Greenhouse management
- Irrigation
- Harvest
- Post-harvest
- Building/infrastructure maintenance
- Cooking/Dishes
- Facilitating meetings
- Livestock feeding
- Breeding
- Ordering of livestock supplies
- Woodlot management
- Social/emotional management
- Grass management
- Construction
- Child care
- Communicating with buyers
- Record keeping
- Food safety
- Public relations
- Payroll
- Grocery Shopping
- Meal Planning
- Feed or Seed Purchase
- Crop and cultivar planning
- Selling at farmers market
- Labor Management

## Activity #2. Attributes Of Management Team Individuals

Next we will work individually to collect an understanding of management team individuals.

1. Worksheet #2 is provided on the next page. Print as many pages of this worksheet as are needed so that each person has enough to cover all the individuals in management roles for your business.
2. Each person, working independently without discussion, writes their understanding of the skills, weaknesses, personal traits, interests, and personal needs of each person who will have a management role, including themselves.
  - There are no right and wrong answers.
  - Strengths can be weaknesses and vice versa.
  - Remember this exercise is about each individual on your management team rather than about the tasks they may be performing now.
  - Do this work without honing in on what roles you think they or you should have. The point is to truly understand the human resources available to your farm.

### Consider:

- **Knowledge-Based Skills:** Acquired from education and experience (e.g., computer skills, languages, training and technical ability).
- **Transferable Skills:** Portable skills that people take from job to job (e.g., communication and people skills, analytical problem solving and planning skills)
- **Personal Traits:** Unique qualities (e.g., dependable, flexible, friendly, hard working, expressive, formal, punctual, being a team player). Include the informal roles they already play.
- **Personal Needs:** Needs that must be met for a person to succeed and thrive.
- **Interests:** What are they passionate about? What do they love doing? What makes them alive?

### More Ideas:

|                   |                   |                     |              |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Analytical        | Independent       | Mechanical          | Confident    |
| Creative thinking | Decisive          | Attention to Detail | Writing      |
| Thorough          | Determined        | Time management     | Charismatic  |
| Disciplined       | Domineering       | Curious             | Clear-headed |
| Perfectionist     | Expressive        | Delegation          | Experienced  |
| Supportive        | Good communicator | Frugal              | Has training |
| Patient           | Motivates Others  | Good with numbers   | Calm         |
| Diplomatic        | Talks too much    | Consistent          | Organized    |
| Procrastination   | Intense           | Focused             | Methodical   |
| Assertive         | Dreamer           | Futuristic          | Pragmatic    |
|                   | Careful           | Researcher          |              |

### 3. Discussion: Share Your Lists To Deepen Understanding.

When everyone is finished, have a group discussion, each person sharing their thoughts.

- Notice the areas where you agree.
- Discuss your thinking in areas where there is different perspectives.
- Listen with the goal of understanding.
- Accept different opinions. Do not make demands of change from each other.

## 2. Attributes Of Management Team Individuals

Name of person being described:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Written by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Knowledge-Based Skills:** Acquired from education and experience (e.g., computer skills, languages, training and technical ability).

**Transferable Skills:** Portable skills that people take from job to job (e.g., communication and people skills, analytical problem solving and planning skills)

**Personal Traits:** Unique qualities (e.g., dependable, flexible, friendly, hard working, expressive, formal, punctual, being a team player). Include the informal roles they already play.

**Personal Needs:** Needs that must be met for a person to succeed and thrive.

**Interests:** What are they passionate about? What do they love doing? What makes them alive?

### **3. Designate Responsibilities and Roles**

The next step is to designate who will be responsible for what tasks. This does not necessarily mean this person will do the task. It means they are accountable for the timely completion of the task. The responsible person might delegate some of the actual work to others. This role may also include decision-making responsibilities for the area.

The work you did in Activity 2. Attributes Of Management Team Individuals will help guide your thinking.

As you think through responsibilities, remind yourself to include the option of flexibility. The important thing is good communication and a clear understanding of who is responsible at any given time.

- There may be areas you want to share instead of having one person responsible. However, it is often better to have one designated person who is accountable for the area, and share the tasks as needed. This can reduce misunderstandings and decision-making challenges. For example, we have found it works best for us if the person who is responsible for an area is the lead when we are doing teamwork, and the other person the assistant. This allows us all to be in roles of leadership and assistant and creates a structure that is open to different ways of doing things.
- You may want to change some roles throughout the season. In Activity 3 you'll have the opportunity to note "when" someone is responsibility for a particular task. For example, on our farm, my partner was responsible during summer and fall harvest months for cleaning, cooking, and keeping the refrigerator properly stocked, as I was busier then. I was responsible for it during planting season.
- There may be temporary circumstances such as an aging parent or young child, a health problem or something else that affects what responsibilities are appropriate at any given time. You may want to discuss when and how your team might address such a challenge.

#### **WORDS OF WARNING**

Roles and Responsibilities can be hard to change later. People become accustomed to and in the habit. Expectations become established. Be sure to articulate your desires on this and get buy in.

Many farmers work with their life partners. Be aware that roles have a tendency to cross over into personal life. For example, perhaps one of you has agreed to the role of farm secretary. This doesn't have to automatically make them a personal life secretary. Talk about it in advance. The farm secretary may be responsible for scheduling farm events and keeping everyone up to date. They may want to switch roles in their personal lives.

While a farm is generally most efficient if people are in roles that match their strengths and skills, individuals on your farm may want the opportunity or need to learn new things and take on challenges. Think carefully how you want to structure these situations. It can be a challenging situation to build trust and set boundaries if the less "qualified" person is in charge of the area. Would it be better to structure in the opportunity for them to do some of the work and learn from the work and the more qualified party? This could build an expectation for a learning/teaching relationship. Consider how this might be structured for a positive outcome.

Get buy in from all managers to reevaluate roles annually.

### **Activity #3: Designate Responsibilities and Responsibilities**

Work in an area with plenty of room such as a large empty table, island, or open wall.

1. Write each person's name on the top of a sheet of paper. On another paper, write, "someone else."\*
2. Tape the papers in a row on the wall, or lay in a row on the table.
3. With all of the people who are decision makers for your farm, sort the post-it notes of important responsibilities you wrote in Activity #1 by placing them under the person's name you think should be responsible.
4. **Do this sorting without talking.**
5. If another person doesn't agree with where a responsibility has been placed they can:
  - a. Move it.
  - b. Create a duplicate post-it note and stick it elsewhere as a shared area.
  - c. Anyone can move a post-it note again, and again, or whatever—be creative.
  - d. Sorting without talking forces a deeper listening. You'll be asking yourself what the other person is thinking. There will be time to discuss later.
6. Continue sorting the post-it notes until everyone indicates they are finished and ready for discussion.
7. Once everyone is finished, a discussion is likely to be needed to sort out final thoughts.

**The Someone Else Sheet:** You may find areas that no one wants to take on, or that require skills no one has. These are often critical areas to address. Work together to identify whether outside resources are needed. This might take the form of a hired service provider, bringing in another partner, or some other strategy. Someone from your management team will likely need to be responsible for overseeing work of a hired service provider. Or you might decide to change your farm plan altogether so that the tasks are not needed.

#### **Now: Group Into Roles**

8. Once you have reached agreement on who will be responsible for specific tasks, group each person's responsibilities into roles that cover similar tasks.
9. Give each grouping a descriptive role title such as Building and Grounds Guru, or Postharvest Manager, or Master of Motors.
10. You'll see in the template below an example of how you might organize your farm around roles and responsibilities. The template also includes:
  - a. When the task will be done: Create an action-based plan for scheduling and time management.
  - b. Decision Maker: Who makes the decisions for the task—*more on this in the coming pages.*
  - c. Information shared: What information associated with the task needs to be shared with other people on the farm—*more on this in the coming pages.*
11. A blank template is provided on the next page. Print as many pages as you have designated roles.
12. Fill out the first column—*Responsibility*, and *When*.
13. We'll take about *Decision Makers* and *Information Shared* next, and you'll come back to the template.

**Example Role:** Greenhouse Manager

**Who:** Betsy Boo

**Date:** 12.1.2017

| <b>Responsibility</b>              | <b>When</b>             | <b>Decision Maker</b> | <b>Information Shared</b> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Write greenhouse planting schedule | December                | Betsy                 | Marketing and Crop Plan   |
| Order Seeds                        | December                | Betsy and Bob         | Marketing and Crop Plan   |
| Harden off plants                  | 3-5 days prior to plant | Betsy                 | Planting Schedule         |

**3. Role:**

**Who:**

**Date:**

| <b>Responsibility</b> | <b>When</b> | <b>Decision Maker</b> | <b>Information Shared</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
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#### **4. Define Decision-Making Responsibilities:** A clear understanding of who is responsible for which decisions.

##### ***What is a Small Decision?***

- Small decisions generally have short-term impact, affect few people, and don't cost a lot of money.
- Small decisions are generally most efficient and effective made by the person responsible for that area of management. However if farmers are responsible for an area where they do not have sufficient experience, it may be important to bring other decision makers or advisors into some small decisions.

##### ***What is a Big Decision?***

- Big decisions generally have long-lasting impacts, affect more people, or cost a lot of money.
- Generally all affected decision makers should discuss and decide big decisions.
- Big decisions generally require more time and research to be made well, including a consideration of potential unintended consequence.

##### **Appropriate Parameters**

What is small or big will have different parameters for different farms, at different stages of a farm's life, or vary based on the experience, skill, trust level, and boundaries of the people.

When our farm was new and very small we agreed that expenses over \$100 would be discussed by both of the decision makers. After thirty years of trust, experience, and stability, that number had grown to \$10,000.

Now we discuss all permanent infrastructure, land rental and purchases because it affects everyone. We have an annual meeting where we do long term planning, create the coming year crop plan, and reevaluate roles.

We do not discuss daily and small decisions such as what type of potting soil to use, which tractor to use for a task, which end of the field to start on. The person responsible for that area makes those decisions. This allows us to take responsibility for own work, creates autonomy, and reduces unnecessary time spent on small decisions. We go to each other to collect information or bounce ideas for daily and small decisions as needed.

It's important to be clear on where the boundaries exist to avoid micro-managing each other. As much as possible, focus communication across areas of responsibility on **Desired Outcomes**—not the details of how.

For example, on our farm I am responsible for the greenhouse. I decide what date to seed in the greenhouse, for what target date in the field. My partner is responsible for field management – which includes soil prep. He decides what equipment he'll use, when, and how. Since planting dates are my decision, I provide him information on the Desired Outcomes—how many, where and when we hope to plant, and depth needed for the root ball. He decides when to work the field, what equipment, etc, to accomplish the Desired Outcome. My expectation is that when the given date arrives, the field will be in ready-to-plant condition. If I have a problem with the field conditions when I plant, I pass that information to him so that he can utilize it for future decisions. This is an important feedback loop. It is not criticism of him or his work. I trust that he will make the best decision he can, with the equipment he has, and the present soil and weather conditions.

If you are a beginning farm, or have a person in an area of responsibility that doesn't have experience, you might not be ready for this level of hands-off decision-making. Talk this through in advance so communication needs and decision-making expectations are clearly understood by all parties. You may need a weekly meeting or field walk to ensure that everyone has a clear understand of the Desired Outcomes and how their activities contribute.

Decisions that affect multiple areas of responsibility are particularly important to pre-discuss. For example, since I manage sales, greenhouse production, and harvest crews, cultivar selection is very important to me. My partner is responsible for field production—including, weeds, fertility, pest and disease, so cultivar selection is also very important to him. Cultivar selections are a decision we make together every year.

**Activity #4 Establish Decision Making Parameters and Responsibilities.**

1. General Criteria To Evaluate Decision Size: Discuss with the other decision makers for your business if there are general criteria you would like to use to differentiate between big and small decisions—single and group decisions.

| IMPACT | PEOPLE | AMOUNT OF MONEY | TRUST/EXPERIENCE |
|--------|--------|-----------------|------------------|
|        |        |                 |                  |

2. Create a list of the decisions your groups designates as group decisions.

| List of decisions that require more than one decision maker. | Who should be part of this decision? |
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3. Using the Roles and Responsibility template on page 8 and fill out the Decision Maker column as needed.

**5. Create Information Sharing Systems:** This section discusses planning ahead for the information that needs to be shared for the individuals to accomplish their responsibilities, and what system(s) will be used.

For each area of responsibility on the page 8 template, Roles and Responsibilities, identify what information needs to be shared with others so that they have the information they need to do their work well.

**Information Sharing Systems:** there are many ways to share information. As much as possible keep it in line with the work, and incorporated into your record keeping system. Make it a habit.

Some systems that work for farmers to share information include:

- Records: Develop record keeping that passes information between decision makers
  - Create template maps of all your fields
    - Print copies that can be written on for record keeping and information sharing
    - Hang poster size laminated maps of your fields in the work area. Write on them with wipe off markers
  - Hang a white board in the work area
- Communication: Develop a plan for scheduled meetings
  - Sync an electronic calendar to share information on it
    - Separate calendars can be made for different tasks, such as planting dates, etc.
  - Google docs spreadsheets can be viewed and edited by multiple people

### Daily

Stay on the same page using the white board to list tasks and major activities. Be sure that the information needed for people to work efficiently has been exchanged. Do you need a short morning, or lunch meeting to supplement written communication?

### Weekly

During the growing season, weekly meetings are useful for laying out the week's work and adjusting for the seasonal changes.

- Is a group field walk or farm tour needed as part of the weekly planning and communication process?
- Check in on how things are going, provide support.
- Prioritize tasks. Evaluate tasks based on importance and urgency. (Use the Eisenhower Box tool)
- Be clear on how much advance notice people need for specific information

### Annually

- Long term planning
- Large acquisition decisions
- Review holistic goals
- Re-assess roles and responsibilities

**Activity #6** On the Roles and Responsibility template on page 8, fill out the Information Shared column with the type of information that is needed, who is responsible to do it, and the system that will be used.

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