

THE NIGHT AMARILLO WENT RED

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Management of people, their motivation, and evaluation has always been critical in organizational success; however, the introduction of new organizational policy, labor law, and societal norms has created new challenges between management and labor. How we decide to hire employees, motivate them, and in some cases terminate them has increased in complexity. It has evolved to include strict adherence to procedure, laws, and company policies. This case revolves around an owner of a huge farm and one specific employee. The owner had to determine different ways of trying to motivate and discipline this and other employees. After a catastrophe the owner had to determine if an employee should be let go and if he has been given enough chances to meet organizational expectations.

The primary focus of the case is designed to encourage a discussion of the appropriateness of the motivational techniques used in the case. The case also targets other areas of organizational behavior. These areas include administering effective punishment and communication. Readers are provided supporting information prior culmination of events. This information, along with what is presented in the final event, must be analyzed to determine responses to several discussion questions. The topics of discussion include effective communication, motivating others, administering effective punishment, and managing employee performance. This case is an excellent example of the influence that communication, motivation, and performance have in the workplace. The case is targeted toward upper-level undergraduate business majors.

INTRODUCTION

Holding his son all he could feel was fear, doubt, and shock. Their faces painted with the vibrant colors of orange and red as the smell of clouded smoke overpowered them. This was a night John Oakley and his son would never forget. How had they gotten to this point? What had happened? All of these answers seemed distant at the moment; however, the events that preceded were a forewarning of where he now found himself.

A few weeks prior Oakley had been spending his nights as he always did, working by the light of an Amarillo sky. Oakley was no stranger to late nights. In fact, most of the time he enjoyed it. He always said that his best work was accomplished under the light of an Amarillo sky. There is a profound stillness and sense of peace when it is just you, the tractor, and God. It was 8 p.m. on November 12, 2018, when his wife, Suzie Oakley, pulled into the field with his supper. Suzie Oakley was a tall, slender woman with looks that could kill a mile long. She was your average farmer's wife, who spent her days tending to their son and house all while working a full-time job as a preschool teacher. It was not unusual for her and Jack to drive out to Oakley and give him his supper, as they knew it would probably be another late night. I mean, the harvest season was almost over, and they had around 1,500 acres of cotton left to pick. As soon as Suzie put her SUV in park their son Jack, who was Oakley's biggest fan, jumped out of the car and made his way towards the John Deere picker eager to see his father.

Once Oakley saw his family with supper, he decided he had done enough for the day and cut the picker off. As he climbed out of the cab, Jack was already at the bottom of the stairs waiting for his dad so he could tell him all about his day at school. As the two were walking towards the car, Suzie noticed Oakley was not very attentive to Jack's dodgeball story, she had already heard twice since picking him up from school. While Oakley was putting his things into his truck, which was parked beside Suzie's SUV, he could already smell the warm, chicken pot pie that Suzie fixed for supper. Once he realized his family chose to bring him supper before eating their own, he told Jack, "Hop into the car with your mother, we are going home to eat together at the table as a family."

Later that night, while Oakley was in the bed and Suzie was still in their bathroom getting ready for bed, she asked Oakley "What was on your mind as you and Jack were walking away from the picker this afternoon?" Oakley began to explain that he did not get nearly enough completed today because Brown had run the work truck out of gas, yet again, and had called him. Not only had Brown run the truck out of gas, but he was nearly forty-five minutes away because he was supposed to be picking up a tractor part. Suzie, being the tender-hearted, motherly figure that she was, stated well honey just give him a break this once. Oakley quickly dismissed that idea as he went on to tell her that this was not the first strike Brown had against him. Recognizing that this was a sensitive subject to Oakley, she decided to not give any more suggestions. She then kissed him goodnight and turned her bedside lamp off to go to sleep.

The next morning at the daily staff debrief, in an effort to get all the employees motivated, Oakley thoroughly reviewed his expectations for each employee in hopes that the current cotton harvest season would finish without a hitch! Oakley

started by expressing the importance of each employee equally contributing to the workday, ensuring that their cooperation would produce a satisfactory work environment for everyone. With a very enthusiastic voice, he happily told the employees they have obtained an average of picking 475 acres each week. Oakley discussed the importance of showing up on time, being prepared, alert while operating heavy machinery, respectful of fellow employees, and honest about mistakes. With 1,500 acres left to pick, Oakley stated that his goal for the remainder of the year was for all the cotton to be out of the fields by Christmas, allowing the employees to enjoy the week of Christmas at home with their families. Oakley added that he would be completing weekly progress evaluations to ensure everyone is staying on track to achieve this goal. Oakley concluded the meeting by thanking each employee for their hard work and emphasizing the importance of each role and how self-rewarding life on the farm can be. Before ending the meeting, Oakley allowed for any and all questions to be asked and addressed so that everyone had a clear understanding of what was expected of them.

PROTAGONIST

John Oakley had lived on this land in south Texas all his life. Being a fourth-generation farmer, he learned the value of hard work from a young age. The blood, sweat, and tears of his forefathers instilled a desire in Oakley to continue the legacy of Oakley Farms for generations to come. He made it his life's work to see the land flourish. Oakley Farms was located in Amarillo, Texas, and comprised of 20,000 acres of row cropland. While his family was known for being the largest cotton producer in the state, Oakley had decided to venture into adding soybeans and corn to the mix back in the early 90s. No one questioned Oakley's ability to be successful, as it was said that farming was in his veins; and it was. No one ate, slept, or breathed farming as much as Oakley, receiving the Annual State Farmer of the Year Award for ten years and counting.

ANTAGONIST

Luke Brown was no stranger to disappointment. After being rejected by his dream university and flunking out of community college, Brown had accepted that academia was not where he belonged, and he moved back into his parent's house. His parents said that if he was going to live with them, he had to start carrying his own weight, so nineteen-year-old Brown went out to find his very first "real" job. After several weeks of being unable to find employment on his own due to lack of experience, his father, who was childhood friends with Oakley, secured him a job on Oakley Farms as a farmhand. The only thing Brown knew less about than academia was farming; however, he was determined to give it his best shot and make his parents proud.

OAKLEY FARMS

Known for housing the largest acreage of row crop in the state, Oakley Farms was a staple of the community. The farm itself was located in Amarillo, Texas, and consisted of 20,000 acres of farmed land, not including the land the family estate sat on. Oakley Farms was established in the early '20s by Oakley's great grandfather, William Oakley. After two tours as a Marine in World War II, William came back to Texas seeking a quiet, slower-paced lifestyle. While he had always had an interest in farming, he never had the opportunity nor the money to do so. After serving in the Marines, saving his money, and incurring a recent inheritance from his late parents, William decided it was the perfect time to give farming a try. He took more than 75% of his savings and bought 160 acres of land that was currently selling for a little over \$69 an acre. As a child, William had always loved the look of cotton growing in a field, and often referred to it as the South's most wholesome snow. Like the ocean, there was just something so mesmerizing about looking across a field of cotton to the point you could not see where the field ended.

William dreamed that Oakley Farms would become a family business that would benefit his offspring for many years to come. Years later, the farm that was once only 160 acres of cotton had grown into over 20,000 acres of not only cotton but also corn and soybeans. It would stun William to know that his humble beginnings on this land had now turned Oakley Farms into a multi-billion-dollar corporation. While there had been many times when Oakley and his forefathers had thought the farm would go under due to inclement weather and low selling prices the Lord always saw them through. Oakley farms had not only grown in acreage over the years but in farm help as well. Oakley had fifty employees to manage, each from a different background and way of life just searching for a way to put food on the table. Since joining the Oakley Farm team, many employees had married or had children, which was even more enticement to bring them to work each morning.

With nearly 20,000 acres of land, using a mule and plow just did not cut it as it did for his great-grandfather William. One might say Oakley Farms was painted green, as all the farm equipment was John Deere. In fact, John Deere routinely reached out to Oakley Farms for suggestions of improvement and their willingness to test out new equipment. Anything from cotton pickers to sprayers, to combines, you name it, and Oakley Farms was one of the first to have it. Throughout the years, Oakley had found that incorporating innovative technology gave their farm the competitive advantage and higher rate for success during harvest season.

TEXAS AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Texas cotton cultivation began in 1821 by Anglo-Americans. By the year 1852, the state had made its way into the top ten cotton-producing states. The increase in production was due to the new land now available for cultivation since the Indians

had been removed from the territory. Like everything else, cotton did take a downward dive during the Civil War, but production increased in the 1870s due to the initiation of the railroad system. By the year 1900, Texas was producing more than 3.5 million bales of cotton (Britton, 2021). The rise in production did not stop there. The introduction of a new plow allowed the land to become even more fruitful as well as the influx of immigrants from Europe and the Deep South that worked as tenant farmers or sharecroppers for landowners. Most tenants lived on the landowner's estate but were responsible for having their own animals, tools, and seeds. Many landowners worked farms containing up to 6,000 acres. Cotton was planted in the spring, cultivated in the summer, and harvested in the late summer and fall (Britton, 2021). All cotton was hand-picked. Tenants usually received around two-thirds of the harvest profit leaving the landowners with one-third. Sharecroppers were not responsible for animals, supplies, or houses, only their labor. Sharecroppers were compensated by receiving half of the harvest profit. Landowners bought and sold goods to their tenants and sharecroppers including items such as clothing, groceries, and medical supplies. Therefore, after they had settled up with each other, the tenants and sharecroppers did not have a large sum of money left.

With more cotton being grown, there was more room for innovation in the ginning process. Ginning is the process of separating the cotton fibers from their seeds, then cleaning the fibers, and baling the lint. Compress machines are used to compact the cotton into smaller bales, to make it easier for shipment. Compresses soon became available to small towns which made the selling process more direct and easier for farmers. With the invention of telegraph lines, cotton was bought and sold around the world more efficiently than ever before. Cotton fibers were sold for clothing, crushed cotton seeds for cooking oil, cotton hulls to be converted into cattle feed, and parts of the plant were used to make plastic.

Despite new technological advances, the cotton industry saw a decline when they noticed boll weevils damaging their crops. Boll weevils are insects that feed on cotton. Farmers began using a mixture of calcium arsenate dust and other pesticides to lessen the damage. The USDA along with county extension services used experimental farms as ways to show farmers how to improve their crops. Numerous other factors contributed to a decline in cotton production including tariffs, the federal government's control program, the increase in foreign production, the introduction of synthetic fibers, and less labor due to World War II and the Great Depression. Once steel and rubber became available to manufacturers again, new equipment and methods for farming were introduced that eliminated the need for tenants and sharecroppers.

The first mechanical harvester was invented in the 1920s and consisted of fence posts attached to an animal and dragged between rows to dislodge the cotton. This ended up doing more damage to the crop than good. Modifications were made to include a wagon with an open groove down the center pulled by horses or mules. Next came the mechanical strippers, which pulled the boll off the plant using revolving brushes. Spindle pickers were also used by pulling the cotton from the boll using revolving barbed spindles. Spindles added moisture to make the cotton adhere to the barbed ends, while the doffers loosened the cotton that was then blown into a steel basket. In 1971, the cotton module was invented which was a large steel box that could hold 150,000 pounds of cottonseed, a cab, and a hydraulic trumper (Britton, 2001). After the cotton was picked by a spindle picker or someone who hand stripped it, it was emptied into the module box where it was compressed. Once the box has reached maximum capacity, a tractor pulls it forward, revealing an eight feet high by eight feet wide by thirty-two feet long rectangular-shaped loaf of cotton. The loaf of compressed cotton was then taken to the cotton gin. Once at the gin, all of the trash is removed from the fibers, and lint is baled into a universal-density press and packaged for synthetic bagging. During each baling process, a sample is taken and sent to the USDA for classification. After the farmer knows the value and class of his cotton, he can sell it around the world. The majority of cotton grown in Texas is exported to Japan and South Korea.

In the twentieth century, cotton production increased as the production was shifted to meet the geographical needs of the crop. For cotton to be successful, it requires naturally fertile soil via manure, commercial fertilizer, or nearby legumes. Slopes in the land can lead to soil erosion and as such should be contoured. Cotton is planted when the soil is warm enough to ensure uniform germination. Usually, ten to fifteen pounds of delinted cotton seed is planted per acre (Britton, 2021). Farmers in East Texas grow more cotton than in West Texas due to the geographical nature of the land. Seeds are planted one to two inches deep and twelve inches apart. Cotton produces the highest yields when harvested early in the season, as inclement weather can cause shedding of the seed cotton from the bolls and thus lower the grade of the fiber. Cotton is important as it is used in the textile industry (linens, upholstery, carpet, clothing) as well as to make explosives back in the 1800s (Britton, 2021). The most common uses today include paper, fertilizers, cooking oils, paint oils, lubricant oils, tires, and feed for cattle.

EXHIBIT 1

COTTON GROWTH FLOWCHART (Bishnu, 2021)

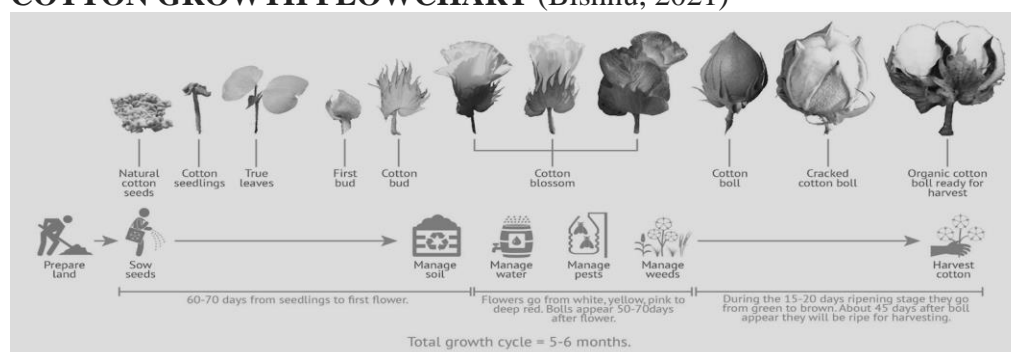


TABLE 1

COTTON GROWTH MONTHLY TIMELINE (National Cotton Council of America, n.d.; Gibson, 2021)

April	Seed planted
May	Spray herbicide
June	Spray herbicide and PIX (growth regulator)
July	Spray Insecticide (if needed) and Spray Defoliation
August	Spray Defoliation
September	Harvest
October	Harvest
November	Harvest
December	Harvest usually completed in November, but can run into this month for large producers

THE JOHN DEERE COTTON PICKER

It was not surprising to people when they found out that the Oakley family only used John Deere products. The John Deere green color is well known, and the brand is one of the most recognizable brands in the agriculture industry. The company was established in 1837 manufacturing small tools such as shovels and pitchforks (Business Model Hub, 2020). Today after many acquisitions, the company

produces a variety of agriculture products that help farmers to become more efficient, like their cotton picker.

While Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, in 1793, did aid in making the cotton ready for purchase, it did not help with the labor required in the fields. Until the 1920's a cotton field was picked by hand in phases because each cotton boll would mature at different rates. Throughout the duration of the Great Depression, two brothers, John and Mark Rust invented a cotton picker which replaced approximately 40 workers because it was able to pick a single row of cotton at a time (Business Model Hub, 2020). Because of the war and steel restrictions, there were not many resources available to continue with new innovations on their cotton pickers.

After the war, in the 1950s and '60s through cotton scientists and the International Harvester company, the cotton picker was able to be advanced into a much more efficient form. Scientists were able to genetically modify the cotton plant so that it would grow taller than before. By the end of the 1960s, almost 100% of the cotton was picked mechanically, whereas before the war it was 100% harvested by hand.

Deere entered the cotton picker market in the 1950s with their No. 8 Cotton Picker, a self-propelled two-row picker. Within the next 30 years, Deere manufactured a four-row cotton picker, which increased the farmer's efficiency by over 70% (Business Model Hub, 2020). Today Deere's newest innovation on the cotton picker is their 690CP model, which can harvest six rows of cotton at a time and constructs round modules in the same machine and drops them out the back without stopping. The 690CP model is the type of picker that Oakley has bought and used for the past two seasons.

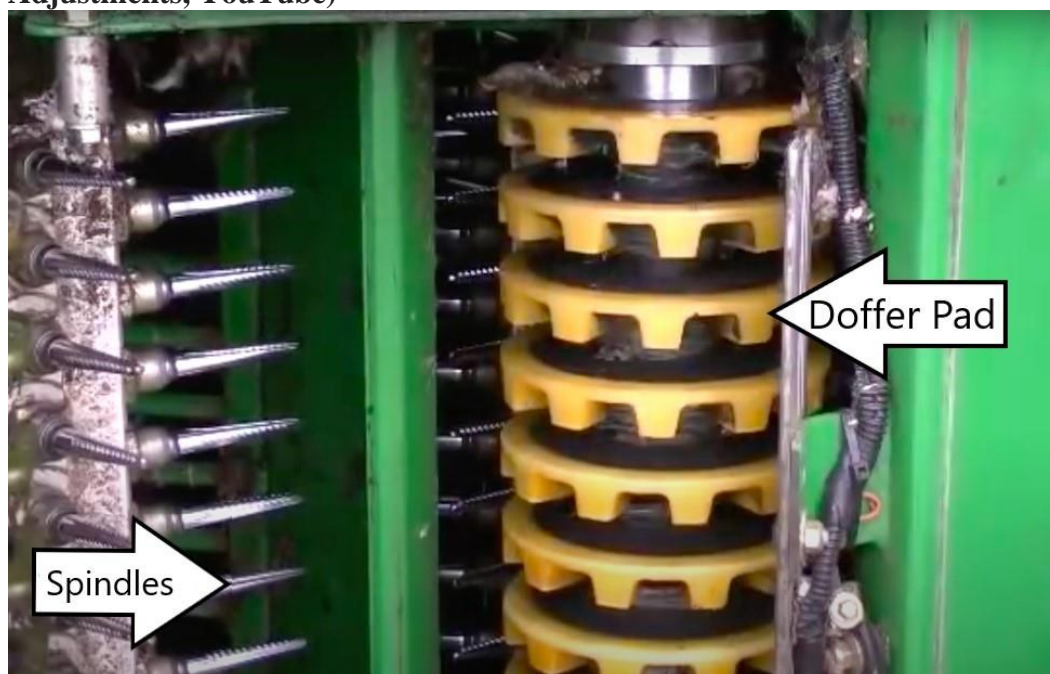
COTTON PICKER MAINTENANCE: PREVENTING DANGER

Deere's 690CP model requires a maintenance inspection every 12 hours, or for many farmers every morning before they begin. One of the first things to check is the solution tank level ensuring there are 50 gallons of solution ready to be used by the auxiliary water system and also checking that the spray nozzle can perform its proper function (*John Deere GoCotton: CP690 Maintenance Information*, 2014). Ensure that both fire extinguishers' pressure gauge is within the green range. Before starting the engine, check the oil and coolant levels. Lubricate all grease fittings and pivot pins. After switching the valve off, thoroughly clean the moisture system solution strainer, making sure to remove all. After cleaning, since you allowed air into the system you must bleed the lines of the moisture system, once air pockets stop flowing from the valve you can close it (Gibson, 2021). Within the transport, configuration inspect the cotton feeder belt for tracking and damage. The cab fresh air filter needs to be removed and cleaned. The frequency of this is determined by

the harvest condition, either normal or extremely dirty. Check the rap floor belt tangent ensuring that the belt is flat approximately one inch from the tangent when moderate force is applied in the center of the belt strands (*John Deere GoCotton: CP690 Maintenance Information*, 2014). Next, remove loose lint from the top of the accumulator and baller chamber. Finish by blowing it off with an air compressor. Use that same air compressor to blow out the engine air filter and radiator. Open all spindles and examine the moisture picker pads, clean the pads manually, and replace any that are damaged. Take something sharp, like a razor blade, and cut off any cotton tightly wrapped around the spindles. You should also check to make sure the distance between the doffer pads and the spindles are correct (Gibson, 2021). If the distance is off, the spindle will become wrapped in cotton, and the friction from the doffer pads will lead to a spark being ignited. Finally, fill the machine with fuel.

FIGURE 1

The Spindles and Doffer Pads (John Deere GoCotton: CP690 Row Unit Adjustments, YouTube)



Above is an image of the John Deere CP 690 model. As labeled, to the left are the spindles which spin in a clockwise manner, and to the right are the doffer pads which spin in a counterclockwise manner. While the machine is in harvest mode, the spindles are rotating under each doffer pad in order to remove any cotton that may get tightly wrapped.

FARM 30: WILLIAM'S PLOT

Farm 30, commonly known as William's plot by all the Oakley Farm employees was full of the finest southern snow, which Oakley expected to receive the highest grade. This 160-acre field was one of the fondest farms to the Oakley family because this was the field that started it all. This is the farm William Oakley went out on a limb and bought for around 11,000 dollars while he had a dream of what Oakley Farms could grow into.

It was close to the third week in November and Farm 30 was the next in line for picking. Oakley was a little behind schedule on getting this farm picked because he had to stop work the previous day to help move equipment from one farm to another because Brown was nowhere to be found.

EVENTS BEFORE THE FIRE

It was seven a.m. Friday morning when Oakley noticed that everyone was at the morning debrief except for Brown. Oakley thought to himself, "Strike two!" Oakley was known as being both a fair and stern boss, and when he asked you to do something he expected you to do it. Oakley decided to ignore Brown's absence for now, and he went about his normal routine delegating everyone to their job for the day. As soon as the meeting was concluded and the men began to disperse, Brown pulled into the shop yard. He was forty-five minutes late. Oakley waited for Brown to come to him, and he did. Brown asked Oakley, "What you need me to do today, boss?" Oakley let out an irritated huff. He said, "Well for starters you can show up on time to work." Brown began rattling off some long excuse about how he had forgotten to set his alarm clock and woke up late. Oakley quickly cut Brown off and told him that because he was late, he would have to service the cotton picker alone today along with washing up the three tractors not currently being used. Brown said, "Don't worry boss, I'm on it!" Brown had served as a helping hand in servicing the cotton picker numerous times, so Oakley felt comfortable he would know what to do. As he climbed the side of his F-250 while making eye contact, Oakley told Brown he had two hours to have the picker ready to go.

Brown quickly got into one of the farm trucks and made his way towards Farm 30 where the cotton picker was parked. He started by cleaning the moisture pads, then he moved on to filling up the water tank with a spindle cleaner solution. The next step was greasing the picker. Brown's heart sank in his chest when he remembered that he had forgotten to check the truck for tubes of grease. Well crap! Brown hopped in the truck and drove back to the shop yard for the grease. Forgetting the grease now pushed Brown back at least fifteen minutes, and he was not prepared to disappoint Oakley again. He jumped out of the truck and sprinted toward the picker with a tube of grease in his arms, like a mother lion after one of her cubs. Brown greased the picker quicker than he ever had before, exactly ten minutes. As he was

wiping the grease off his hands with a blue paper towel, he heard the sound of Oakley's diesel truck pull up beside him. Looking over the freshly greased spindles, he asked Brown "Is she ready to go, and did you have any problems?" Brown's heart beating a thousand miles a minute, he sputtered out a "Yes sir, she's in tip-top shape and the servicing went great!" Before Oakley climbed in the cab and pattered his way down the field, he told Brown thank you.

EVENTS DURING THE FIRE

The vibrant orange and pink painted skyline drew Oakley's attention to the clock. It was seven-thirty. He had been on and off the phone all day with employees, cotton gins, and his banker that he had failed to realize just how late it was. Assuming it would be another late night, he decided to call Suzie. Just as he went to click the green call button, his phone rang. It was Jack calling on his mother's phone. Jack began all his phone calls asking his dad what he was doing. Since the age of five, Jack had always loved learning about the farm and that very often included asking Oakley about his day. Oakley told him he had been picking cotton all day! He asked Jack about his school day, and Jack mentioned a few odds and ends, but eventually diverted the conversation back to farming. Jack asked his dad if he could ride with him for a little while when his mom delivered his supper. How could Oakley say no to that? All he had ever dreamed of was having a son who loved farming to his core like he did and one day taking his place as the head of Oakley Farms. On the other end of the phone, Oakley heard Jack let out a loud "Come on mom, hurry let's go to daddy!" Jack excitedly said, "See you in a few minutes daddy."

Not ten minutes later, Oakley saw his family pulling up in the distance. He stopped picking and drove to the edge of the field to meet them. His tired, calloused body climbed down the stairs and walked toward Suzie's SUV. Oakley stood next to the car interacting in small talk with his wife while he gobbled down a grilled chicken sandwich, bag of barbeque chips, and glass of iced sweet tea. After he was finished eating, he kissed Suzie goodbye and told her, "Jack and I will not be too much longer, see you when we get home". As she drove off, she noticed a faint smell of smoke and yelled to Oakley, asking if he smelt it too. As Oakley and Jack were walking toward the picker, Oakley assured her that there was nothing out of the ordinary, that the smell was coming from the family across the field burning some trash. The dynamic father and son team climbed into the picker to finish up Farm 30 and Jack happily hopped into the buddy seat.

After Oakley fired up the picker, they began to bounce across the top of the field to reach the row where Oakley had stopped. While cruising down that row, Jack begins to ask a million and one questions about how everything works. Since this was normal for Jack and Oakley had already explained everything on last week's

ride and several rides before that, he asked Jack if he would like to drive the picker for a little while. Oakley felt confident in his ability to remain in control of the picker, even from the buddy seat and Jack's eye lit up at this opportunity and immediately said "yes!". After Oakley set the auto-steer on the new 700-foot row, they switched places. Jack being a little nervous but overwhelmingly excited could not help but to repeatedly say "look at me, daddy!". Once they reached the end of this row, and Oakley aided in turning the picker to follow down the next row, he noticed something was not quite right. Becoming alarmed Oakley and Jack quickly switched spots. Before Oakley could even stop the picker, he noticed small flames coming out of the accumulator.

As adrenaline was pumping and the flames were growing Oakley simultaneously grabbed his things and Jack from the cab and forced the picker to release the unfinished model from within the machine. As he was climbing down the stairs, he already had the 911 dispatcher on the phone, screaming out the field address to her. She ensured the fire department would be there within the next five minutes. Standing in the middle of the field, Oakley did his best to console the hysterical Jack while frantically trying to get Suzie on the phone. As the phone was ringing and his mind was running ninety miles a minute, Oakley began to wonder how this could have happened. Suzie naive to the whole situation, answered the phone and received an earful from Oakley. Before hanging up the phone Suzie had her SUV on two wheels turning out of the driveway. After what felt like five hours, the fire department finally arrived with three fire trucks loaded with firefighters. They swiftly began to spray the picker down and ultimately extinguish the fire. After the fire trucks left and night became quiet again Oakley, Suzie, and Jack stood in the middle of Farm 30 with tear-filled eyes wondering how this just happened.

EVENTS AFTER THE FIRE

It was three days before Oakley received any news from the insurance agency and the John Deere service provider regarding the source of the fire. Oakley knew these types of investigations took a while, but he was eager to have an answer. Anxious and unsure what the future held for the 2018 cotton crop, Oakley called his friend at the local John Deere store asking if there was any news yet. The man said they had just finished up their meeting with the insurance company to finalize their report and would be on their way to him shortly. It was six in the afternoon when they pulled up to Farm 30. The look of desperation was still evident in Oakley's eyes. As they made their way to the blackened cotton picker, they began to make small talk about the weather. Oakley quickly shut down that conversation and told the men to just "spit out what happened to his equipment." The conversation was led by the insurance adjuster, who began by stating that he was glad Oakley and Jack made it out of the flame engulfed picker safely. Oakley thanked him but asked that he get on with it. The man recognized Oakley's growing frustration and said

that the fire was ruled as a human error not mechanical. Oakley let out an irritated, “what does that mean?” The adjuster led the group towards the front of the picker and began to explain that essentially the cause of the fire was that the picker was not serviced correctly. Oakley raised an eyebrow and stated that he thought it was serviced just fine as it had run several hours that day without any problem. The man went on to explain that during servicing, the cotton must not have been cleaned out around the spindles and doffer pads. If these areas are not cleaned, cotton can accumulate and that mixed with the friction of moving parts would ignite a spark that would get sucked up into the accumulator that houses the lent, and then the whole picker becomes inflamed. Oakley stood there, silent. After a few minutes, the representative from John Deere asked Oakley if he had forgotten to clean the spindles and doffer pads. Oakley shook his head and then hung it low. Oakley told the men that one of his farmhands had serviced the equipment that morning. No one said a word. Oakley shook the hands of everyone there and climbed into his F-250 without saying anything.

As Oakley drove to the shop yard, he could feel his blood pressure rising. Trying to prevent himself from having a heart attack, he turned on the radio. Dierks Bentley’s “Feel that Fire” was playing, and Oakley quickly hit the mute button. It was a quarter to seven when Oakley’s truck came barreling into the shop yard, leaving a trail of dust. The men were all getting ready to head home for the day but decided to hold off for a moment to see what all the commotion was about. As Oakley exited the truck, he asked all the employees to gather around. As soon as everyone was in attendance, Oakley asked the group if they would go through the step-by-step directions for servicing the cotton picker. Everyone began taking turns spitting off different tasks until someone mentioned cleaning the spindles and doffer pads. Oakley asked the group why this task was so important, and a quiet voice responded that it could cause a fire. The quiet voice was Brown.

Oakley dismissed everyone to go home, but Brown stayed back. Oakley asked Brown to walk him through what he did the morning when he was asked to service the picker. With embarrassment and disappointment on his face, Brown admitted to Oakley that he had forgotten the important step of cleaning the doffer pads and spindles. He continued by giving the excuse that had he not forgotten the grease and was in a time crunch, if not he would have remembered. Oakley put his hand up signally Brown to stop talking. Oakley took a deep breath as he knew his next words would be difficult to hear. Oakley began, “Brown, as you know I have been addressing your performance issues for quite some time now. Despite numerous performance reviews and chances for improvement, you continue to show no signs of refinement. Not only have the careless mistakes continued, but they have gone up in severity each time. As mentioned in our last discussion, the next step is termination, effective immediately. Therefore, you can hand over your work keys

now, as today was your last day. I will pay you until the end of the week, but that is all.” Brown apologized for putting Oakley and his son in danger and thanked him for the opportunity to work on Oakley Farms. After Brown handed over his keys, he walked slowly to his truck reflecting on the fact that this would be the last time his boots worked on Oakley Farms.

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