



April 2009

**LifeKnowledge®
At Work**

To advance the integration of LifeKnowledge through local teachers.

Our Founding Partners



JOHN DEERE



LifeKnowledge® Featured Articles

Life Knowledge in Action

[Listen in](#) as the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education focuses on the development of students' skills in reasoning, thinking and coping..

Posed Question

The LifeKnowledge Center is looking for your feedback! [Help grow your peers!](#)

Archived Feature

What Difference Do Good Directions Make?

In this [article](#) from the April 2007 issue of LifeKnowledge At Work, ag teacher Kris Elliott of Hanford, Calif., talks about the influence of good directions and gives advice on how to improve in this area.

Sponsor Remarks

[Click here](#) to read this month's sponsor remarks, as a Monsanto employee shares her favorite FFA memory.

LifeKnowledge at Work

Subscribe today to have the latest from the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education come straight to you. [Click here](#)

LifeKnowledge News

LK University, Changing lives through Mentoring and more. [Get the details!](#)

Comments & Success

[Contact us](#) with your comments, questions or LifeKnowledge success stories.

Supporting Partner



Podcast: Precept Series- Mental Growth

LifeKnowledge in Action

The first in a series of podcasts focused around each LifeKnowledge precept, this episode is on Mental Growth ([PODCAST](#)). Here we discuss ideas on how to help your students grow by using inquiry-based learning to develop reasoning, thinking and coping skills.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Posed Question

The LifeKnowledge Center is looking for your feedback!

Thanks to all of those who responded to our last posed questions. This issue features Michael Siebert's responses. Siebert is the agriculture educator at Coldwater High School in Coldwater, Ohio.

LK-Q: How do you coach students for a lifetime of success?

MS-A: Students need the qualities and abilities to show success through their career, families and personal life. By teaching life skills such as public speaking, confidence and politeness, students are given tools in their toolbox to be able to overcome any obstacle. In my class, one of the activities is a weekly plant review. Students are tasked to give a five-minute overview of a plant of their choice, charging them to find unknown knowledge, build conclusions and stand in front of the class to present. All of these tasks will help the students in mastering skills that can and will be used in and out of the classroom.

LK-Q: How is it different and/or the same as coaching them for FFA events?

MS-A: I believe coaching FFA events is different from coaching others for success in many ways. Being more contest- and plaque-driven, FFA coaches tend to educate students only for that event so he or she is able to win that contest. They usually do not take those skills and put them with everyday activities in life. Whereas coaching students so they succeed in life, they more often take on education that will be used in more ways than one. Although from both perspectives, students may be able to take any skills they learn and, if they choose to, put them to use at any time and in their own ways.

The LifeKnowledge Center is looking for your feedback! Help grow your peers by responding to this issue' LK question:

How do you use technology in your classroom?

Respond by e-mailing lifeknowledge@ffa.org and we may feature your response in the next issue of *LifeKnowledge At Work*.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Archived Feature

What Difference Do Good Directions Make?

By Kris Elliott, Agriculture Teacher, Hanford High School, Hanford, Calif.

I'm sure all of us in the teaching profession can admit to falling into several bad habits when it comes to giving directions. For example:

- Giving directions before the class is fully attentive. (You find yourself repeating directions several times.)
- Letting students know they will be working in groups before you give the instructions. (They immediately concern themselves with who they will be working with rather than what they will be doing.)
- Giving students too much information at one time. (Sometimes complex instructions need to be chunked for maximum retention, or else students forget everything.)

One of the most annoying things is when you give a set of instructions and then after students start working, you hear, "So what are we doing again?" Even worse, you may answer the same question several times. So, how do you avoid this and clearly communicate the first time around? Here are some strategies embedded in LifeKnowledge that I have found to be helpful.

- **Be specific.** For example, tell students they have 30 seconds to locate their notebooks, a pen and a pair of scissors and meet you outside the door. Then, after getting students outside, you can continue your instructions for the activity or lab.
- **Use signal words.** Words such as "Go" keep students focused until you are ready for them to move/get started. Sometimes students start moving before the instructions are done and you find yourself saying "Wait, wait, I have a couple more things." You can also pick a word out of the subject matter you are teaching and use it as a signal. For example, if we are studying soils, I might say, "When you hear the word horizon, we are going to..." (Ask the class to repeat the signal word back so that you know they've got it.)
- **Be student-focused and inclusive.** Instead of saying "I need you to get out a pair of scissors and you will need to create a poster," say "We are going to create a poster that demonstrates..." or "We will use pair of scissors to..."
- **Set the tone/create accountability.** Make students accountable for directions. For example: "Today' activity is very important to the success of our greenhouse project. Carefully listen to these instructions and retain information so that you will be able to repeat them back to the class when I call on you." Give the directions and then call on a student at random to give the instructions back to the class. It may take a couple of students to get this done, but eventually they will get into the habit of listening attentively because they know they could be called on at any time.
- **Clarify.** Use a signal word, action or question to ensure clarification. For example, let students know that when you clap or snap, or even say the words "pause" or "freeze," everyone is to stop what they are doing and give their attention to the front of the room as quickly as possible. Practice this before students begin working. This replaces the old way of saying "Attention up here," "Everyone quiet please," "I'm still waiting," etc. When asking students if there are any questions, use the words "What questions are there?" or "What can I clarify?" This will make students feel more comfortable asking questions. And if they do ask about something, the whole class will be listening (before the work starts), so everyone will benefit.
- **Less is more.** Keep it simple. Try to condense your instructions to the real important stuff with less fluff and extra words that may confuse your students.

Good directions lead to better student work. There are fewer mistakes and fewer students that need to start over because they didn't listen carefully. I love the fact that I can now sit back and watch students creatively work on projects and assignments. There is usually no need for me to clarify or repeat instructions. Students are working on their own and don't need to be interrupted during their work. It has saved me a lot of frustration and I'm becoming a more effective teacher.

But it did not come without some work. Following are a few things I did that I recommend to teachers who want to give better directions.

- Videotape yourself and watch your instructions. Watch the student reactions to your instructions. What questions did they ask for clarification? How did the project or assignment turn out? Most of us do not like watching ourselves, but this truly helps.
- If you teach two periods of the same class, try giving directions the old way and then the following period, try giving them LifeKnowledge style. Did you notice a difference? What was the student work like? How many times did you need to clarify?
- Try giving directions from an actual LifeKnowledge lesson. How did it feel? How did your students react?

"Good directions lead to better student work. There are fewer mistakes and fewer students that need to start over because they didn't listen carefully. I love the fact that I can now sit back and watch students creatively work on projects and assignments."

Giving better instructions takes practice, but the results are immediate. It will make your job easier and your students more successful. For me, it has definitely been worth the effort!

[BACK TO TOP](#)



Sponsor Remarks

Crissa Fruechte, this month's respondent, is a past state FFA officer in South Dakota who interned with Monsanto for a few years before being hired full-time as a local field advisor in South Dakota.

LK- Q: What is your favorite memory of FFA?

Monsanto- A: My supervised agricultural experience program (SAE) in ag sales is the memory that I will always have fond memories of. At the young age of 13, I was the DenBesten seed dealer in northeast South Dakota. I'll never forget the first time I sold 150 bags of Roundup Ready Corn to a farmer...who was not a relative. Butterflies don't even begin to describe the nervousness I had at the time! Thankfully, through FFA, I had the tools to be confident in myself, the ability to listen to my customer and the drive to help him be profitable on his farm. Not only did I walk away from that sale with a huge smile and an order for 150 bags of seed corn, I was completely taken over by the warm feeling of helping others. FFA has given me numerous opportunities to enhance my talents, but number one, FFA has shown me the fulfillment and reward of helping others succeed.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

What's New?

Welcoming New Education Specialist

A special welcome to Stefany Deckard, who joined the LifeKnowledge team on March 2, 2009. Stefany brings eight years of classroom experience to the team. She received her bachelor' in secondary English education from Indiana University and her master' in education from Indiana Wesleyan University.

LifeKnowledge University

To better serve our customers and the agricultural education profession, the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education will continue to offer free professional development webinars.

Take an hour to learn about LifeKnowledge Online and teaching strategies - and gain some professional development in the process. [Check out the summer webinar schedule.](#)

NEXT WEBINAR:

LifeKnowledge University: [LifeKnowledge Webinar](#) - Coaching 4 Life

Thursday, May 14, 2009, 6-7 p.m. EST - The LifeKnowledge Center will host a live webinar that is open to all who want to learn more about preparing students for classroom success as well as coaching them for success in the game of life. This is a great professional development opportunity.

[Sign up to attend the live webinar.](#) Hurry - space is limited.

Once you register, you will receive login information for the webinar via the e-mail address you provide. If you have questions, please e-mail them to ikonline@ffa.org.

Request for Applications

LifeKnowledge is on board with a new project of the National FFA - a Middle School Agriculture Awareness and Literacy course. A full year' curriculum will be developed this summer by 16 writers. To find out more and to apply to become a writer for this project, go to <http://lifeknowledge.ffa.org>. Applications are due by May 18, 2009. A professional development

and writer' conference will be held July 6-11, 2009, hosted by the LifeKnowledge Center.

Questions? E-mail lifeknowledge@ffa.org.

Changing the World through Mentoring

Partners in Active Learning Support (PALS), the National FFA Organization' mentoring program, is back in the publications business! You don't want to miss the spring issue of "PAL to PAL," their new electronic newsletter. Get news on all of the latest happenings, including information about how PALS, Campbell' Soup Company and the LifeKnowledge® Center for Agricultural Education have combined visions to produce a new PALS resource, the *Grow Your PALS Program Guide*. You'll also find out how FFA chapters around the country are matching their high school members with elementary school students, what peer program resources are available, and who else is partnering with PALS. Want to know more? It's easy - just check out "PAL to PAL" now at www.ffa.org/pals. Don't delay - make your day!

[BACK TO TOP](#)

© 2009, National FFA Organization

Join the [LifeKnowledge mailing list](#) and get the LifeKnowledge At Work newsletter delivered straight to your email inbox.

You can also sign up for other great FFA e-Publications.