



PEOPLE ARE A TREMENDOUS ASSET TO YOUR DAIRY.
Find out what motivates them so that you can all work together toward a shared goal and future success.

Pump up your people

By clearly communicating your own vision, you can motivate your employees to work toward that same shared goal.

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EMPLOYEE management essentially boils down to two things: a) realizing that we are dealing with humans whose behavior will be influenced by emotions and b) communicating efficiently to manage employees' emotions and behaviors.

In other words, we cannot approach employees like we handle crops or cows. One reason is because we don't have as much control over an employee's life as compared to the control we have over plants and animals. After all, employees may only spend 8 to 12 hours a day on your farm, and only a few years out of their entire life. What they do outside the farm, what they did before they started working on the farm, and what their plans are when they leave the farm are all factors that can affect their behaviors and over which we have little to no control. In addition, human emotions and behaviors are much more complex than crops and cows.

Determine what drives them

Successful employee management requires skills such as communication, leadership, empathy, and active listening. Few people are born with these skills. While there is no magic formula or crash course that will instantaneously turn you into an expert in employee management, the good news is these traits can be learned. With practice, we can use them to become better employers and managers.

A group of motivated and loyal employees is what most farmers ultimately desire. To achieve this, some understanding of motivation is in order. Motivation can come from external factors such as money, rewards, or other forms of performance evaluation, but there is something more to it.

Just ask yourself why you own or operate a

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farm. Chances are, earning a living is part of the answer, but there is more to it. There is a certain passion for farming and a devotion to your farm. For many, farming is what makes them feel worthy and useful to society by producing valuable goods while promoting values they support. It is what they are good at and proud to support. Most also enjoy the freedom and independence of being one's own boss. And for most, farming is part of their social identity.

Chances are you identify yourself as a farmer and are proud of it. When you find an occupation that can give you all that and put bread and butter on your table, you tend to care about it and keep it!

Motivation is similar for employees. Science shows that cultivating feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are key to developing motivation and engagement among your employees. Play to their strengths, avoid dwelling too much on their weaknesses, and offer them opportunities to learn and grow their skill set. Show them the value and impact of their work; nothing is more demoralizing than doing chores for which you cannot see the benefit. Whenever possible, give them choices, whether it be about the timing of chores or the specifics on how to carry it out. Additionally, try to make them feel welcomed and part of your team.

Be a leader worth following

Leadership skills can help you cultivate motivation and engagement. Leadership is all about your ability to articulate and share your values, goals, and vision with your employees to inspire them. If owners and managers are unable to communicate their goals and vision, employees may be left wondering about the value and meaning of their work, which ultimately leads to demotivation.

On the other hand, clear values and vision can help employees make sense of their jobs, find value in their work, and become engaged and loyal to your farm. If they have the feel-

ing that their work supports an organization with a laudable mission, it will continue to motivate them. For example, some employees will see value in working for a farm that is progressive, adopts new technologies and embraces change; that takes progressive measures to protect the environment; that is involved with its local community; or that embodies family traditions and values.

Chances are your values and vision are related to your own passion for farming, and sharing those values and mission will give you a chance to share some of that passion. It's easier said than done, but that is one area that you can work on. A number of workshops and programs are held each year by farmers' associations, extension services, and some private consultants and companies.

Show interest in your people

Active listening and empathy are other useful skills when it comes to employee management. The logic is simple; listening and showing interest in who your employees are and what they do will allow you to better understand their behaviors and emotions. It can help you in leveraging their strengths and interests and in managing potential conflicts between employees. It will also help in building and maintaining a healthy relationship and making them feel like accepted and integral parts of your team.

It doesn't mean you should become their therapist or confidant, but asking them about their life outside the farm, their ambitions, and how they feel about their job every once in awhile can be a good start. It can take place as you sit together in a truck or tractor, over a lunch break, or during a more formal performance review. The most important, though, is to listen actively to their answers!

Finally, a number of other basic tools can be helpful in establishing and maintaining good communication with your employees. Taking the time to fully define and write down farm policies, procedures, rules, job descriptions, responsibilities, and expectations will all contribute in making and keeping things clear.

These tools will help you give effective feedback based on a common understanding of expectations and responsibilities. You are more likely to be perceived as fair and objective and less likely to put an employee on the defensive.

Drafting these documents can help in the hiring process to identify needed skills and assess how likely a candidate is to succeed in a position. They also will help identify what kind of additional training might be needed. 🐄



Many online guides and resources are available to help you draft farm handbooks and job descriptions. You can find a number of links to such resources at our website <http://fyi.uwex.edu/ag-human-resources/>. We encourage you to check with your local extension office and farm business association for additional information as well.