

5 SIGNS

YOU MAY NEED TO IMPROVE YOUR MANAGEMENT SKILLS

I recently read an article titled “5 signs that you are a bad boss” (Randy Hall, 4thgearconsulting.com). It inspired me to come up with my own “5 signs to improve management skills,” based on my observations when visiting dairy farms and talking with managers and employees.



FYI

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It’s normal for managers to have a hard time evaluating themselves, and sometimes it requires a third person to make a better assessment. I’m often asked to evaluate managers’ skills and define areas for improvement.

It’s important when doing this assessment to not only meet with the managers, but also to talk with employees. This helps make a better evaluation of the dairy’s management practices.

Based on my observations, a dairy’s management skills require work if:

1) Employees tell me the last time they talked to a manager/supervisor about their job was more than a month ago. Most good employees like to be listened to, and want to understand how things are going on the dairy. Having a weekly meeting with milkers, for example, to discuss parlor performance, milk quality and things that need to be fixed or addressed is critical to keep your milkers motivated and focused on their job. Don’t manage by special occasion and only talk to employees about their performance when things are not going well. Talk to them about your expectations and goals and let them know how they are doing.

2) Employees don’t know how they are being evaluated. Many times I ask employees whether they think they are doing a good job or not. Sometimes, they answer: “I assume I am doing a good job be-

cause the boss hasn’t talked to me since the last time I made a mistake.”

Lack of feedback is one of the most common weaknesses I see in most dairy managers. Whether it’s good, average or bad, you should tell employees how they are doing at least monthly. A more formal performance evaluation is recommended once or twice a year (read about a negotiated performance appraisal from Gregory Billikopf on my website at www.apndairy.com/articles or at cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7bielikov.html).

3) There’s a high employee turnover rate. It’s not a good sign when employees frequently call in sick, or when they leave your dairy after only 6 months of work. Most of the time, employees quit their jobs because of their supervisor, not because of the company or because they don’t like their job.

4) Specific jobs are done differently, depending on who’s doing it or what day of the week it is. When there are no well-defined protocols, people will always find different ways of doing a job. Clearly this is not good for the cows. Sometimes front-line workers do things different than what the manager told them to do.

To avoid this, written standard operating procedures (SOP’s) and job descriptions are a must. They are critical for getting things done well and consistently, no matter who’s doing it and what day of the week it is.

5) Other things take priority over visiting with your employees. People are your most important resource. So it’s critical you take the time to talk to your workers, addressing issues or solving problems (like getting a milking machine fixed quickly) that may affect your employee’s performance and efficiency. Also, take time to get to know your people better, discussing their future at your dairy.

If you have any of these signs/problems at your dairy, then you have work to do. Improving your management skills will reduce

your labor problems, reduce employee turnover and create a much better work environment at your dairy. □

DAIRY EDUCATORS, SORIANO TEAMING UP ON EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION SURVEY PROJECT

Michigan State University-Extension is initiating a project to improve communication on the farm. This project is supported with funding from the North Central Center for Risk Management Education and USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This project, coordinated by MSU Extension dairy educators Phil Durst and Stan Moore, will be available to dairy producers who contract for the program. They will work with Felix Soriano, owner and consultant of APN Consulting, LLC.

To participate, a dairy must have at least five employees. The project personnel will meet with the owner and evaluate his or her perception of employee satisfaction and engagement. Farm employees will complete a survey via phone interview, either in English or Spanish. Project personnel will summarize and review results with the owners to determine steps to improve communication and engagement on the farm.

Responses will be anonymous, and no identifying information will be revealed.

Dairy producers in Michigan and eastern U.S. are invited to participate in this project. For more information, contact:

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