

Employee motivation takes partnership

by Dairy Excel

Farm employers often ask, “How can I motivate my employees?”

They can't do it alone! A better question is, “How can I work with my employees to help them be motivated?”

Employee motivation works best as a partnership between employer and employees.

Frustrations abound. The lack of motivation often frustrates employers; this is surely not a surprising fact to anyone. What does surprise some employers is that employees' lack of motivation often frustrates them as well.

These frustrations are compounded by the obvious fact that most any approach to motivation will sometimes work for some people. The kicker is that no approach works all the time for all people.

There is little that is simple about motivation. Motivation is the inner force that drives employee behavior. The intensity of one's inner force to do a task or accomplish a goal describes the level of motivation.

Two people may both say and believe they want to be excellent employees. The intensity of their desire to be excellent measures their motivation. Motivation is the force that causes employees to deliver on what they say.

Other factors. Self-motivation plays a crucial role. Achievers tend to continue achieving. Past accomplishments, challenging career goals, expertise in one or more areas, pride in one's abilities and self-confidence contribute to self-motivation.

Employees, however, sometimes bring a lot of baggage to the workplace from their childhood experiences, previous employment and failures to find their motivating niches in life.

Constant effort. An unmotivated person can become motivated. On the other hand, a motivated person can lose motivation. The opportunity to motivate employees is never completely lost nor is the accomplishment of motivated employees ever guaranteed to continue indefinitely.

A partnership. Employee motivation works best as a partnership between employer and employee. It means that employer and employee working together accomplish more than they accomplish by each working alone.

Of course, employees and employers sometimes fail to work on the motivation challenge together. Employees can bring their self-motivation, experience, good intentions and training to the job. Employers bring their insights about employee needs and rewards.

The motivation partnership means that both employee and employer are committed to helping each other rather than waiting for the other to solve the motivation puzzle.

The employer and employee share responsibility for motivation, i.e., cooperation not separation.

Employee contributions. True partnership between employer and employee in the motivation challenge requires each to understand and play their parts well.

The employee's most important contribution to the partnership is self-motivation. Employees also need to search for a job that fits their knowledge, skills, abilities, needs and interests. A miscast employee almost certainly will eventually lack motivation.

No matter how good the fit is between employee and job, the employee must be willing to learn. Even the most experienced employee should admit, "I don't know all I need to know."

Taking a new job means fitting into the employer's vision, mission, core values and goals. Finally, the employee has the responsibility to communicate his or her needs, concerns and ideas to the employer. Listening to the employer's point of view is the other side of this communication coin.

Employer's contributions. The employer needs to pay attention to things that dissatisfy employees. Imagine working with unsafe equipment or with irritating co-workers. Imagine exhausting physical work for too many hours per week. Unfair pay and unfair supervisors also dissatisfy employees.

Taking care of the things that dissatisfy employees doesn't guarantee motivation. Employers also need to provide some motivators. Examples are a sincere thank you for a job well done, satisfying work, responsibility, fair compensation and new experiences.

Communication with employees is essential. What is a dissatisfier for one employee may not be a dissatisfier for another. A single workaholic employee may have no objection to a 60-hour workweek. Parents with small children may find 60-hour workweeks highly dissatisfying.

What motivates one employee may not motivate another. Opportunity to learn new skills may be motivating for one employee and a worrisome burden for another employee.

Stop complaining. Employers and employees complaining about each other accomplishes little. Wishing the other person would change doesn't help either. A practical solution is working together to benefit themselves and each other.