

# Motivating Dairy Farm Employees: It's Not At All What You Might Expect

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The large dairy production units of the Western United States are significant business institutions. Large dairy businesses handle millions of dollars in cash and equity. They require a large staff of employees to accomplish the multitude of tasks that must be accomplished daily. Superior employee performance is vital if the business is to remain solvent and competitive. Several significant changes are propelling the industry to become more like classical "big business" and much less like the 40-cow family farm of old. The lucrative federal system of milk price supports is all but gone. The federal system will never be the market clearing force it once was.

The net effect of this change will force dairies to adopt greater and greater economies of scale. This scale will require a greater number of employees involved in the production of milk. Other significant changes are the demographics of the employees and employment law. The typical dairy farm employee is better educated, may be bilingual and is more interested in upward movement in society. More and more farm workers in the West are integrating into the urban economy in a wide variety of business. Dairy employers will have to compete with their urban counterparts. As politics and legislation continue to focus on the farm employment arena, farm labor law will change. Current and future labor law works to ensure the rights of farm workers. A number of farm worker organizations carefully monitor employer-employee relations to guarantee the rights of the employee. Their effort's center on education and legal action.

The history of worker relations and management in the coal mines and the factories of the early 1900's reads quite similar to the modern stories of the success and tragedy of the farm worker. Major change in the philosophy of employee management within "big business" in this country did not occur as a result of educational enlightenment of the US business manager. Rather the Japanese listened to our business schools, people like Dr. Edward Demming, and nearly beat us at our own game. Modern business learned out of necessity.

Agriculture and especially the dairy industry in the West need not blindly repeat the mistakes of businesses, like the auto industry. Large dairy farms have a golden opportunity to learn from the mistakes others have made and become excellent people managers. There are faint signs this change begun. The purpose of this discussion is to fan the fire of change and provide some simple insights that will facilitate the process.

We come back to the issue that seems to be on the minds of managers of large farms. How do you motivate employees? The answer is you can't. They are already motivated. Back in 1968, Dr. Frederick Herzberg in his work with the manufacturing sector, showed that all employees are motivated. The problem arises from the management belief that they are not and we need to find clever and unique ways to get them to do what they really don't want to do. Anyone who has raised children knows all about that management theory.

The simplest and surest way to get someone to do something is ASK. If that fails then we have

to deal with the obstinance. We are all masters of that. It is reminiscent of the torture scene in which some gruelish fellow says “we have ways of making you talk” Our modern methods are a lot less bloody, but the effect is the same. The next tactic is to TELL the employee. If the employee does not understand, we have a communication problem. This problem reminds me of the time my dad tried to teach me to drive the car. Since I was not good at mind reading, I didn’t do very well. “What we have here is a failure to communicate” or so the line goes in a scene from Cool Hand Luke. The last approach is to SHOW him. Certainly the employee will “get it” if the manager takes time to train and demonstrates the task. “Oh, but that is going to take so much time.” “Heck, I might as well do it myself,” is a common feeling when confronted with the time and effort needed to train someone. There will always be those who believe it’s easier to force the issue and use the KITA approach. KITA has something to do with a foot in the posterior.

There are all kinds of “snake oil” (kita) techniques out there for gettting employees to do more, faster, better and cheaper. Most of those approaches involve KITA in one form or another. There are several forms:

- Negative Physical KITA: The literal application of the term will not to motivate. After the judge passes sentence you probably will change your management style.
- Negative Psychological KITA: Threats, degradation or humiliation do not motivate!
- Positive KITA: Do this job or task and you will receive a reward. Some say this is motivation.

This is really a tactic to get people to do things that they would not do if it were not for the reward. Hence, I conclude they are not intrinsically motivated, rather seduced.

There are valid applications of incentive programs, but let’s make the clear distinction that they change behavior without altering the intrinsic motivation of the employee. The question remains, how can we motivate our employees? We can’t, but we can provide satisfaction and provide opportunities for employees to fulfill those intrinsic needs, that we all share.

We all work for reasons other than money. Achievement, growth, recognition, social benefits and giving meaning to our existence, all have a lot to do with why we seek meaningful employment. On the list of the “big” motivators there is no mention of working conditions, days off, cash incentives, and health insurance. These factors are important but many researchers suggest they do not provide the motivation that gets us out of bed in the morning and push us to work with pride, commitment and ownership. Dr. Herzberg’s research, and that of more than a dozen others, examined the attitudes of workers in many countries and occupations. They found that there are many factors that provide job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Curiously, they found the job characteristics that cause extreme job satisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction were seldom the same factor.

Another way of looking at the findings reveals that some factors, like salary and working conditions, were generally associated with reasons for dissatisfaction and were not reasons for extreme satisfaction. In contrast, factors such as job recognition and achievement were associated with extreme satisfaction and seldom with extreme dissatisfaction. The factors associated with extreme job satisfaction (motivation) and dissatisfaction and shown on the chart. The job attributes range from security on the low end of the motivation scale to achievement on the high

end. Take some time to reflect on the management style of your operation or employer. Where is the emphasis placed and what level of motivation exists?

Managers tend to manipulate only the factors in the right half of the chart in the expectation that only they can motivate the employee. Because most employees perceive those factors as satisfiers, their efforts are doomed to fail. However, because the factors represent somewhat of a hierarchy of needs, efforts to provide employee recognition, to increase motivation, in the face of salary dissatisfaction are also doomed.

Given that your employees are driven by a series of relatively constant factors that either only provide very modest satisfaction and others that fulfill the employees' intrinsic desire to work, managers have their work cut out, if they seek exceptional employee commitment and performance. The take home message from Herzberg's chart is place your management emphasis on the employees' strongest motivations.

### **Where is the real problem, Managers or Employees?**

A number of years ago I received a phone call from a very unhappy farm manager. He was complaining, loudly and in expletives, that all milkers of one ethnic type were no ———— good and it was impossible for him to get a single good employee. After listening for some time, I came to a conclusion and I shared it with him. I suggested that just perhaps the reason that he could not find a single good employee had a whole lot more to do with him and his attitude than the attributes in any would-be employee. He angrily said, "What do you mean?" The conversation didn't last long after that.

To my surprise, I have learned that many of the contemporary business analysts, the likes of Tom Peters and Jay Hall, reached the same conclusions. Hall asserts in his book, "The Competence Process," that workers are not the problem, bosses are. We tend to exalt technology and management when things go well. When things go bad we blame the workers. The more enlightened of managers realize that people need to work and do well for their self esteem and mental health. Yet we still manage them as if we need to find clever ways to get them to do things when they are trying to find every way not to. Something is amiss and maybe it is not the employee.

Dairy producer Steve Maddox has led the way in modern employee management in the farm sector. He suggests "The challenge [for management] is to help your employees keep their "edge." The edge is that extra interest and commitment from people getting more than a pay check and eight hours of busy work. Specifically, Steve Maddox found through experience what Herzberg discovered in research: recognition is a powerful tool for employee management. Recognition can be as simple as talking with the employee and seeking their advice or publicly recognizing them for outstanding performance. Recognition ranks second only to achievement in Herzberg's motivators. In the book, *The One Minute Manager*, the power of recognition is beautifully and simply captured in the management advice, "Catch Someone in the Act of Doing Something Right" and by all means tell them about it!

While understanding the motivations of the employee may be easy, implementing a management style that is honest, trustworthy and consistent can be as difficult as changing the personality of the manager. It can be done and it will take practice and conscious daily choice.

### **Help for managers and Supervisors**

Many have come to the conclusion that the biggest obstacle to improving the satisfaction and

the intrinsic motivators in the workplace is the behavior of the manager. Many books, consulting firms and training programs offer training for supervisors. Seek them out and invest time and money in this training for farm managers. We place too great an emphasis on milk production, nutrition, mastitis, business management and forget that the modern farm is only as good as the ability of the manager to implement decisions through the employees.

One concept of the supervisor's role that should be easy for many to relate to is that of "employee coach." The model of the coach is one of a team of workers all desiring the same goals and it is the role of the coach to help the employee improve and reach their personal and common team goals. There are many models for building successful coaches and teams. Let me share one that is simple and easy to implement:

## **THE MANAGER AS COACH**

### **A. The Lineup.**

Who is on the team?

What are their attributes? Analyze their strengths and weaknesses B. What players would be best for which positions?

### **B. What players would be best for which position**

What are their interests and goals?

### **C. Steps for Building a successful game plan.**

1. Buy in and ownership by the players  
Do the employees share the goals of the farm are they willing to help?
2. Costs are understood  
What do we all stand to gain or lose?
3. Results must be clear, provide recognition for success  
Employee performance goals must be clear, and easy to understand
4. Progress is measured  
Data is available to all and measures understood
5. Benefits are obvious  
Benefits have meaning to employees and managers

### **D. Coaching Secrets**

Rate yourself low (1) to high (5) on these attributes:

1. Be available
2. Promote Participation
3. Build Relationships
4. Delegates
5. Provide Feedback
6. Allow Mistakes
7. Be a Role Model
8. Offer Training
9. Set Goals
10. Have High Expectations

11. Share Information
12. Celebrate Attempts
13. Encourage Teamwork
14. Grow Experts
15. Reward Innovation
16. Have Unannounced Celebrations
17. Say "Thanks"
18. Show Your Emotions (+,-)
19. Pick Your Issues Carefully
20. Be a Team Player

#### **E. Coaches as Communicators**

Sending:

Follow up, ask questions, seek clarity

Avoid over communicating

Use "I" statements, Don't attack

Establish ground rules for communications

Receiving:

Active listener

Paraphrase back to sender

Show empathy

Eliminate Defensiveness

Never Assume

#### **F. Coach as Trainer**

Remember: EX DEM PRA MON

EXplain

DEMonstrate

PRActice

MONitor

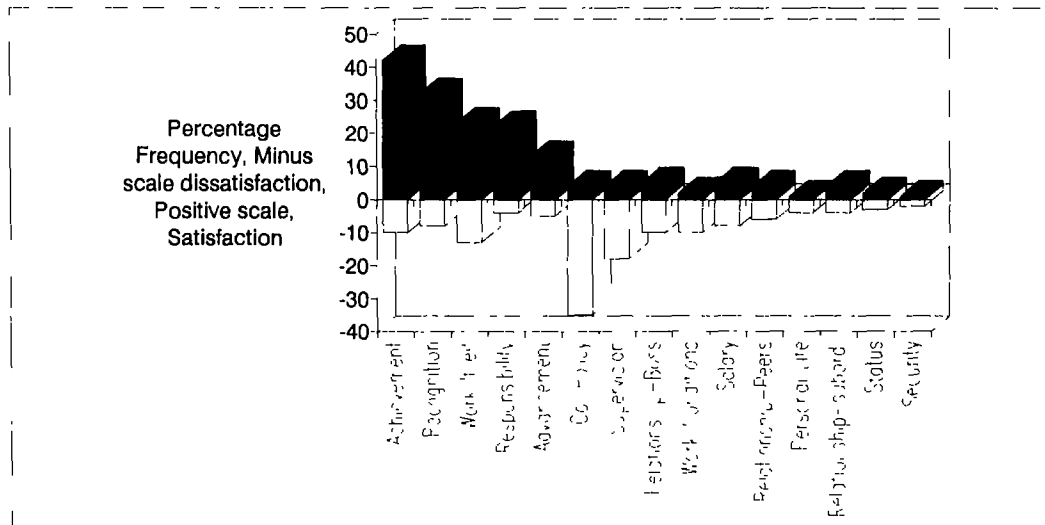
#### **G. Coaching for a Loyal Team**

1. Demonstrate the priority given to the team's people needs
2. Show the team's impact on the bottom line
3. Relate to the Person rather than the task
4. Recognize frustration
- . Address frustration promptly
6. Ask for input
7. Collaborate
8. Involve the team in goal setting
9. Provide swift feedback to input
10. Share your spotlight

In this discussion of managing employees on the large Western dairy farm, we have traced changes in the industry that are making effective employee management more critical than ever. The science of human behavior reveals that all people are motivated and motivated to work for a variety of factors. Some of these factors are tremendously powerful; others provide a neutral level of satisfaction. To be effective managers of people, our actions must speak to the motivators and less to the gimmicks many have used in error for so long. The modern dairy manager will need to invest time and money to attain the skills for successful farm management. People management must become a higher priority. The economic value of profit-maximizing dairy nutrition and feeding, for example, is lost if employees do not personally share the objectives of the management.

Clearly, our employees are motivated. We need to understand that motivation and apply the painful lessons of our predecessors and become excellent managers of our motivated employees.

Factors affecting extremes of job attitudes (Herzberg 1968)



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**Removing Barriers  
To Communication  
In The Dairy Farm  
Business**

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