

## **Selecting, Training and Developing Personnel to Deliver Results**

Jorge M. Estrada, M.S.,  
Estrada, Simmonds & Associates.  
P.O. Box 731570, Puyallup, WA 98373  
Tel 360-481-0133  
jorge@leaders-coaching.com

Carlos M. Simmonds, DVM  
Estrada, Simmonds & Associates  
6208 N Park Meadow Way # 103, Boise, ID 83713  
Tel 208-573-5680  
carlos@leaders-coaching.com

### **Introduction**

As dairies grow and evolve across the country, they become people organizations that require a new level of leadership and management. These dairies continue to look for ways to increase their efficiencies. Typically, employees have been readily available to work for dairies across the industry. But hiring qualified individuals is becoming harder and harder. Many times people are hired into dairies without much experience or knowledge of the work being done to produce milk. Have you ever asked yourself, how do General Motors, Kraft, Starbucks, Cargill, or Microsoft excel at what they do? Most likely they do place a great deal of focus on hiring the right people and then train them to increase their chances of success in the organization. Most industries outside of Agriculture, and even some businesses in Agriculture, have been using pretty robust recruitment and hiring methodologies, as well as training and development to increase employee knowledge and skill. But there are many opportunities to increase consistency, accuracy and efficiency on dairies by placing more importance on hiring processes and by implementing more regular training programs.

One of the key things we need to recognize in our industry is that none of the things being covered and presented on any and all of the papers being presented in this conference can become a reality or be implemented without our people, or without any training of our people. For training to have the focus it needs in an organization, it needs to become part of the culture of the dairy, leaders need to create and model the importance of hiring good people and training them to produce the best results possible. Any more, the way dairies are managing people, including how they hire and train them, is what is giving them a competitive advantage over others. In this document we share what we consider of importance in hiring and training personnel to produce results.

### **The knowledge and learning gap**

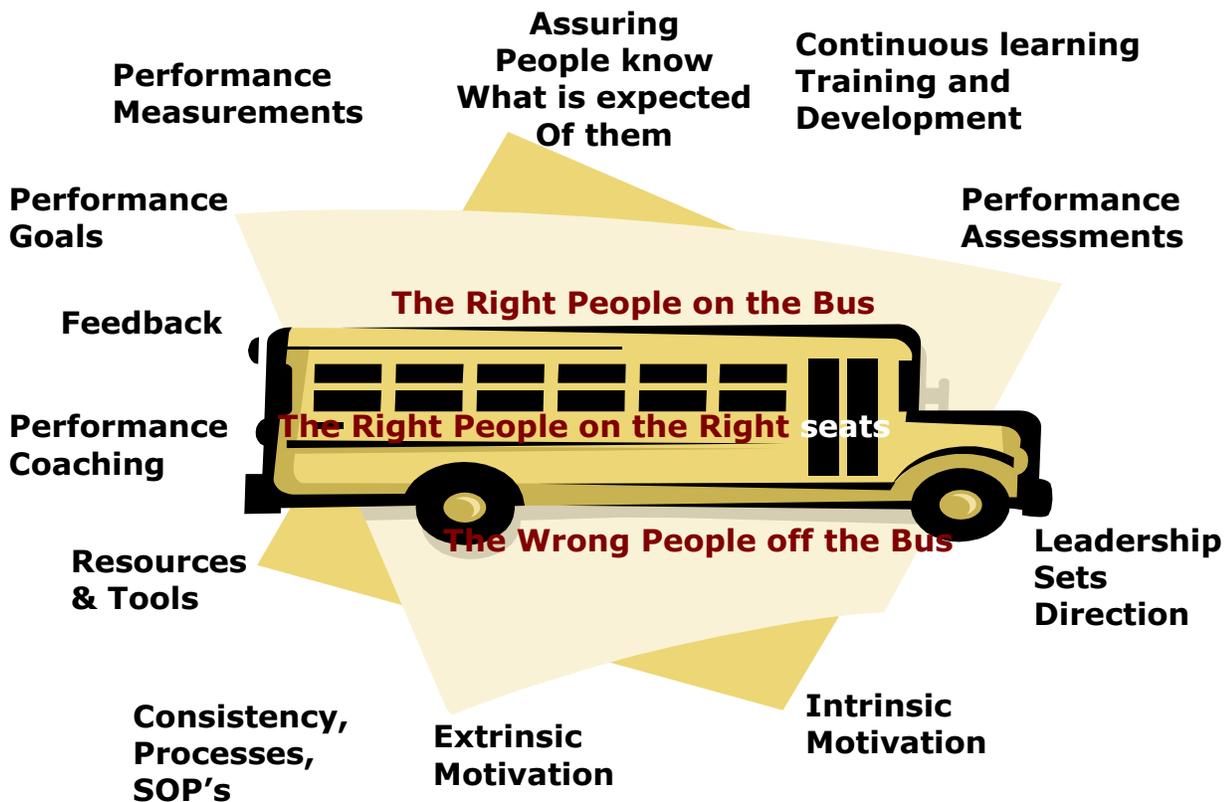
Dairy owners and managers have been developing for years. Their development has involved acquiring knowledge and skills in specific areas such as milking and udder health, reproduction, feeding and nutrition, overall animal health, and others. The technical knowledge and abilities of these managers is the best in the industry. So we asked ourselves, what about the technical knowledge, skills and abilities of the rest of the employees and dairy? Practical experience tells us that there is a pretty wide gap between owners/managers and the rest of the employees and the dairy. What we see happening is that employees that are hired on to the dairy, specially if they are Hispanic, come in and have to gain knowledge and skills on the go, without having access to specific or advanced training. We suggest that in order to close this gap, technical training and development need to shift to supervisory level and

frontline worker level. As this shift occurs, training and development of ownership and upper management needs to shift to more business management.

Preliminary results of a field survey we are conducting indicate the average school grade achieved by dairy workers below management level in the organizational structure is about 6<sup>th</sup> grade. We have also found out that the majority of these employees have not attended any training meeting of any sort or have attended 1-2 sessions. This compared to the school grade level achieved by personnel in management positions, which is likely to be high school level to college degree level, and the number of programs likely attended by this group, creates the knowledge and learning gap we are talk about. Training programs for employees can and do make a difference in closing this gap.

**Bringing the right people to your organization**

Jim Collins, author of the recent book, *Good to Great*, uses a bus analogy to describe people and performance in a business (see illustration). The bus is the business. The bus driver is you, the CEO, the manager. And you, more than anyone else on the bus, determine which direction the bus is headed and whether you ever get to where you want or need to go.



You want the right people on the bus (motivated, hard-working, happy employees who perform), and the wrong people off the bus (un-motivated, poor attitude, low-performing employees). As important, you need the right people in the right seats, aligning the talent and skills people have to the job where they will perform at their best. So how do you determine who are the right people for the bus? It might start in the recruitment and hiring processes we are using. Then determining what strengths those people bring to the business and aligning those strengths to specific roles and responsibilities. For example, placing a person who is detail oriented and has aptitudes with numbers in a feed mixing and delivery role.

## **Recruitment and hiring processes**

Recruitment seems to be a very variable situation in the dairy industry. Dairies seem to spend more time and effort in recruitment initiatives when the open position is higher in the organization (operations manager versus milker or feeder). A question we ask dairy managers is, what kind of people do you want to have working with your cows day in and day out? Many times there is not a very formal process in place. The higher the quality of work we want done on our dairies and the better the results we want to deliver, the better the recruitment and hiring practices are going to have to be.

In order to develop more consistency, and increase the quality of personnel we are hiring onto dairies, we suggest dairies create a simple hiring program that is followed consistently. Here we present some quick guidelines that might help you develop a recruitment and hiring program for your dairy.

A quick guideline for recruiting and hiring personnel for dairies:

1. Prepare a clear and concise description of the roles and responsibilities for which you are recruiting. This will help you know which candidates might fit the role better, and it helps screen candidates.
2. Prepare a summary that would fit an advertisement. Disseminate the information to your network (veterinarian, nutritionist, banker, suppliers, etc.), and place it in newspapers and publications that possible candidates would have access to.
3. Have applicants fill out an employee application, and ask for references. Note: some applicants may not have writing or reading ability in English or Spanish.
4. Review applications and select those who you might have interest in interviewing.
5. Consider performing an initial phone interview to ask some basic questions. Schedule an interview date.
6. Prepare for interviews; define the questions that can be asked for the particular job being applied for. Strongly consider a hands-on, practical interview, where the applicant has a chance to demonstrate abilities claimed in the application (i.e. milker – milk for 1 shift)
7. Try to determine the talent, knowledge, skills and experience of the person, and establish a rank or grading scale, which you will use in determining who to hire.
8. Thank the applicants and tell them they will be notified of your decision (do follow up with each one).
9. Communicate your decision to the person who you selected for the job and establish a date to show up for work and what to expect in the first few days of employment.

It is very important that when a person is being interviewed or hired, that the owner and/or manager make the decision in conjunction with the supervisor for whom the employee will be working for. Better yet, to have that manager or supervisor manage the recruiting and hiring process.

## **Do your new employees know what you are about? New hire training**

What is new hire training? It is the process new employees go through in the first few days to few weeks in their new job. New hire training programs on dairies vary greatly across the border. On one extreme, we see no new hire training program in place, where the employee is basically shown to their respective area and job the very day they are hired, and expected to begin performing right away. In these cases, no one shows the new employee any thing about their job. No one shows the person what is expected of them, what needs to be done, why and how, much less what the dairy is about.

On the other extreme, there are dairies where, from day one, somebody (the manager, the section leader, a mentor) takes the time to go over the big picture of what the dairy is about, tells their new employee

what is expected, and then tells them what their job is about, what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, and shows them how. The new employee enters a training period where someone will be working with them closely. In these cases, new employees are observed over a period of several days. They are given praise for job well done, and corrective feedback in areas where improvement is needed.

New hire orientation gives the worker the feeling that this is a well run business and that there is organization. This sets the bar high for the employee from the beginning and begins to create a sense of high performance in the employee early on in the employment process.

### **Focus on strengths – Distinctions among talent, knowledge and skills**

The Gallup organization, probably the largest surveying and poll organization in the world, has conducted thousands of employee interviews across the globe. When they have asked the question at work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? Only 20% of employees strongly agreed with the statement, in other words, only 20% feel that their strengths are in play every day at work. What about the other 80%? What does this mean for employee motivation and delivery of results for the businesses they work for?

Let's dissect this area of strengths for a moment. How do we define strengths? How do we define talent, knowledge and skills? The table below shows the distinctions between the three.

Talent: talents are your naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior (i.e. a person with a magnetic personality who gets along with people and is seen as leader in a group).

Knowledge: knowledge consists of the facts and lessons learned (i.e. bacteria can cause mastitis, and how mastitis develops in the cow).

Skills: skills are the steps of an activity (i.e. agile use of a loader and mixer to accurately and consistently mix feed at a dairy).

**TALENT x KNOWLEDGE x SKILLS = STRENGTHS**

Talent, knowledge and skills combine to make up a strength. But time and time again we hear of dairy managers saying: "If Jose would only focus on this weakness of his, if he would just pay more attention and be great at catching the details, he would be a much better employee". That is nonsense. Our creator has given us a set of talents, abilities, those that make each one of us who we are. If cultivated, those talents and abilities can mature to full blown strengths. Strengths of your employees are what is going to make you successful, not their weaknesses. We are not saying we should forget about our weaknesses: we need to be aware of them and manage around them.

Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton describe it best in "Now, Discover Your Strengths". Based on a Gallup study of over two million people, they developed a revolutionary program that shows you how to develop your unique talents and strengths, and those of the people you manage. They reveal three of the most important principles of living a strong life.

First, for an activity to be a strength, one must be able to do it consistently. And this implies that it is a predictable part of one's performance. That is how Tiger Woods has won many golf tournaments and

that's how some dairy herd managers get their people to perform, to achieve 32,000 lbs RHA and high net incomes in their businesses. One must demonstrate it time and time again, and also derive some intrinsic satisfaction from the activity.

Second, one does not have to have strength in every aspect of their role in order to excel. One does the best one can with the cards we are dealt.

Third, one excels only by maximizing one's strengths, never by fixing one's weaknesses. As I said above, do not ignore weaknesses; find ways to manage around them so you can be free to focus on strengths and sharpening them.

As a leader you would be better off learning as early as possible the strengths of your people, then place them and develop them based on those strengths they bring to your business. Not only will you succeed, but they will too, through your success and how they will feel about using their strengths.

### **Understanding learning styles**

One of the key aspects to consider when speaking of hiring and training personnel on dairies is that of differences and learning styles. What kind of learner, are you? Is your learning style, more like picking up a brochure or notebook on the subject and read through it? Or is your learning style more like is going out there and doing it, experiencing in, getting your hands dirty? Learning styles have been classified in the general sense as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The first example above is a more visual learning style. The second example is more a kinesthetic learning style. Most of us use a combination of these three learning styles. In agriculture, because of the type of work performed on dairies for example, we tend to use a kinesthetic learning style most often. Think of the milking procedure, or pulling a calf at calving, or mixing feed at a 1500 cow dairy. We could use a video and charts at the office show a worker how to do any of these jobs so that they can see (visual) and hear (auditory) what needs to be done step-by-step. We all know, that this type of training is not very effective compared to one where we can engage the employee in using most of their senses (kinesthetic).

### **Developing training programs for dairies**

As a dairy owner, manager, or employee, you know the importance of consistency, accuracy, and delivering results in a dairy operation. In order to do that, training programs need to be established with consistency and some guidelines should be followed:

1. Determine what area or department needs training the most.
2. Determine who needs to attend the training.
3. Determine who is the best person at the dairy to be a trainer, or who from outside of the dairy can be enrolled to do the training.
4. Training requires cow-side observation, feedback, follow-up and coaching so that employees integrate the learning from the training program and so that new behaviors stick.
5. Establish how the training will be conducted: in classroom or classroom/cow-side combination. Determine when the training will be conducted and how long it should last. Schedule the training ahead of time and bring materials needed (flip charts, markers, VCR, TV, dairy equipment or tools needed for the training).
6. Establish a training program for each department for the year.

Training programs on dairies typically focus on the more technical aspects of the operation and the tasks employees conduct on a regular basis.

Training programs currently being conducted for dairy employees:

Milker training	Maternity/Calving training
Feeder training	Calf management training
Repro/AI training	Fresh cow training
Dry-off cow training	Vaccination training
Equipment maintenance	Irrigation training

Other training programs to consider, as dairies grow and develop:

Decision-making	Team building
Basic English	Supervisory skills
Safety	Human Resource Management
Public relations	Correct Use of medications
Computer training	First Aid
Basic reading and writing (English and Spanish)	

Many dairies that evaluate their costs of production know what their figures are for labor costs per cwt, but very few dairies have a specific budget allocated per year to training programs.

### **Language and training**

One of the dilemmas we face when training personnel on dairies is whether we should conduct training in English or in Spanish. Training in Spanish is the preferred method for most Hispanics as this is their native language and learning tends to be more visceral; in other words, more of the learning is retained, particularly if conducted in simple basic terms, easy-to-understand. Training in English can be used for English speaking employees, as well as Hispanic employees who have a pretty good handle of the English language.

### **The cost of training versus not training**

Other industries (and some in agriculture) have realized the difference in the cost of training versus not training personnel. Typically the costs of not training involve mistakes and errors made while on the job. What is the cost of having to dump a load of milk because a person milked an antibiotic-treated cow or cows into the tank with milk being shipped off the farm? What is the cost of a person not knowing how to handle a cow having calving difficulties that ends up in losing an animal at calving

time? What is the cost of a person breaking a piece of equipment or machinery that you paid over \$100,000 for? What is the cost of a person adding more or less of ingredients needed in the ration?

Another thing to consider is should you pay for training? We believe training should be paid for. A number of businesses in agriculture, including dairies, are recognizing the value of training, and setting aside budgets for the year specifically for training purposes. Some organizations are allocating between a thousand and \$3000 per person per year, just for training and development of their people. From the dairy employee standpoint of, if people are taking time outside of their regular paid time to go to training, they should be paid. If they are receiving the training while at work, then we don't see a reason for employees to get paid for that training.

## **Training as a tool for motivating employees**

What we observe in dairies across the country is that employees, particularly of Hispanic origin, are always very encouraged and motivated when they are offered opportunities to develop, to get training and expand their knowledge and skills. On the other hand, lack of opportunities for self-improvement can be a de-motivating factor for dairy employees.

## **Succession planning and cross training**

Succession planning might be a foreign term to people. Succession planning means developing the people that will take the next position, when a person is needed for that position. If a supervisor position is created at the dairy, who has been developed or who is ready to take that position? When promoting from within “The Peter Principle” many times applies: promoting people because they are very good performers in the job they are in and not having developed them to acquire people supervisory skills. In other words, taking them to their next level of incompetence: for example, promoting your best milker to be a milking parlor supervisor when that person does not have any people supervision skills sets him up for failure at the job.

## **Leadership training and development**

As we have mentioned before, we see a shift occurring in the type of training dairy owners, managers and supervisors are getting. One of the most critical training issues for this level is leadership development and training. Very few dairy managers have taken the time to hone in on their leadership and people management skills, and supervisory skills. This is one of the next dairy management frontiers: to go from a cow manager to an organizational manager, a people manager, and this requires a higher level of leadership effectiveness that may only come from training and development programs specifically designed for this purpose.

## **Conclusions**

In order to create consistency, accuracy and to deliver results on the work being performed on dairies, owners and managers must place an emphasis on hiring and training employees. Employee talent and strengths must be considered in order to align them with the right job on the dairy. Better hiring practices and training programs give dairies a competitive advantage in the market place.

## **References**

Billikopf, Gregorio. “Labor Management in AG: Cultivating Personnel Productivity”, University of California, 1994.

Blanchard, K. Ken Blanchard on Managing Employees. Western Dairy Business. June 2001.

Buckingham, M. and D Clifton. Now, Discover Your Strengths. The Gallup Organization. The Free Press, New York. 2001.

Collins, J. 2001. Good to Great. Harpers Collins Publishers, New York.

Employee Management for Production Agriculture. A Conference By Kansas State Research & Extension. August, 2004. Oklahoma City, OK

Estrada, J.M. and C.M. Simmonds. 2003. Developing Supervisors From Within: Mentoring and Coaching New Managers. Proceedings “Managing the Hispanic Workforce”. Jan. 28-29, Grantville, PA. Jan. 30-31, Canandaigua, NY.

Estrada, J.M. and C.M. Simmonds. 2003. Expanding Employee Skill Sets. Proceedings "Managing the Hispanic Workforce". Jan. 28-29, Grantville, PA. Jan. 30-31, Canandaigua, NY.

Harris, P.R. and R.T. Moran. "Managing Cultural Differences". 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Judy E. Soccorsy, Editorial Coordinator, Gulf Publishing Co.

Morales, M. "Understanding and Working with Hispanic Employees". Presented at the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin Annual Meeting. January, 2001.

Senge, P. 1990. The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. Currency Doubleday, New York.