

Labor Management Panel

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Introduction

The Labor Management Panel for this year’s WDMC is composed of two individuals that are engaged with the dairy industry in Colorado. Ms. Mary Kraft is a highly valued partner in the Quail Ridge/Badger Creek Dairy Farms operations in Fort Morgan, Colorado. Often called the “Flow Dairy” in trade journals, Quail Ridge Dairy was designed and constructed by Chris and Mary Kraft with the flow of everything in mind. The Kraft’s 4000 cow dairy in Northeast Colorado opened January 2007, even though construction on the facility wasn’t complete until July. The ramp up began with extensive training at Badger Creek Farm (the home dairy, milking 1500 head with a double 22 parallel) to set up new managers before Quail Ridge opened. Traffic patterns for moving cows, milk trucks, feed trucks, air, commodities and people make the 5- 800 cow free stalls and double 50 parallel parlor highly efficient.

The second individual is Dr. Roman-Muniz whom is an assistant professor; Department of Animal Sciences at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO. Dr. Roman is starting her third year in the department and is very engaged with undergraduate teaching and is also the extension dairy specialist for Colorado. Noa received her DVM at the University of Wisconsin and an MS in Clinical Sciences with an emphasis in adult education at Colorado State University. Noa grew up on a dairy farm in Puerto Rico prior to her education in Wisconsin and Colorado. She is a highly valued faculty member at Colorado State and will have an exemplary career with the dairy industry in Colorado as Colorado’s dairy industry expands in the next few years.

Identifying and Developing Middle Managers

Mary Kraft

Look Inside

The first step is to look at you, your goals, and your dedication to them. Are you a cow manager or a people manager? Are you willing to relinquish the actual cow handling activities and let others be responsible? Do you feel you have to win every point, or can you get excited about the successes of your people? Are you interested in other people's growth, and how much are you willing to put into their development? If you are a successful family person, you do these already, it's simply a matter of paradigm shift to raise your employees like you raise your family- and we all know it's sometimes a hard, thankless job. But then some days, it's amazing! Raising kids and raising employees is like eating an elephant- absolutely overwhelming if you try to eat the whole thing at once, yet completely doable if you take it one bite at a time!

Start With the Right Ingredients

You know that it takes just as much feed, space and resources to have an underachieving cow as it does to have a good one. Why do we think it's any different with the people working at our dairies? The most important aspect to finding good people is to not hire the bad ones to begin with. That means not settling for a warm body, but choosing EVERY new employee based on the following criteria:

1. Are they motivated (look for a new pick up, or an expecting wife)?
2. Did they take care of themselves – if they don't take care of that, what do you think they will do with your stuff?
3. Did they show up on time for the interview, and with the proper documents already in hand?
4. Did they pay attention during the hiring process, and behave respectfully (sit up in the chair, turn their cell phone off, keep their family in order, etc.)?
5. Did they really understand what you said about their role in the job, and if they didn't, did they ask respectful questions?
6. Do they have an attitude- a good one or a bad one?

Put Them in the Right Place

Chris and I were among the first few crops Tom Fuhrman turned out in his management seminars. He helped us design the hierarchy for our dairy. Knowing where each person belonged in the chain of command and responsibility simplified the training and oversight processes. No one manages more than 6 people DIRECTLY. More than that and the system stalls.

Begin the Shaker Box Program

New employees are put in with a trainer in their area. When we have a class for that area EVERYONE goes and we repeat the classes every 6 months or so if we can. This is the beginning of our shaker box program. We use these programs to sift out the various levels of employees. Who listened and applied the information, who slept or was not engaged. Who went to the class and got all of their work done, and who complained that they didn't have time to learn. Who followed or even added to the protocols being developed through the training? All that said, it is also of vital importance that you clearly stated (and believed) that you valued education and that this is part of their job. Then you can see how they embrace it (or not).

The Dog Whisperer

I trained horses, and enjoyed a horse trainer named John Lyons, who could take an unbroken maverick and have it happily loping around with a rider in a few hours. He managed to convey his intentions and directions to a 1200-pound beast that didn't speak his language. I figured if he could train without English- through body language, positive rewards and consistency, I could easily do it with my children. Using them as guinea pigs, I practiced using those tools. I use it now to train our people. Cesar Milan, the Dog Whisperer, does the same thing with snarling, timid or territorial dogs, too. He calls this Calm Assertive Energy. Watch his show -the language and culture barriers dissolve whether you are dealing with people or animals!

Supporting Your Employees: Mentors, Meetings, and Resources

All of the employees we have that have risen to the top have had a mentor – a father back on the rancho that made them do the whole job, and made them understand the families economic consequence when the job wasn't done well, an uncle on a US dairy farm or good manager in previous employment. These people have already begun to change their culture from communal people in which the elements acted upon them, to people who take charge of their own destiny. We assign a mentor to our up and coming employees, too. There have been dozens of articles about the value of mentors in publications like the Harvard Business Review, which are developing leadership in mainstream companies. It takes time and dedication to be a mentor, but you get what you put into it.

We have weekly meeting (all department heads) in which everyone comes to present about their area- issues, concerns and triumphs. It helps us keep a pulse on a large operation, but also is a means of teaching responsibility, preparation, communication and problem solving. For many of our employees, who perhaps achieved a 6th grade education, this is new ground!

We use several tools (all available on Amazon.com) to help that cultural paradigm shift. These American culture how-to books: One minute manager, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 21 Indispensible Qualities of Leadership, are in Spanish, but are from the Anglo culture (we got some of them in CD form for the people that weren't that keen on reading). We offer elective English classes with our local community college (the teacher comes to the dairy, and delivers the classes after the employees' work). The people who are willing to take the extra time and understand the value of these tools will be the ones you can and should be cultivating.

Training the Trainers: How to Facilitate the Development of the Middle Manager's Training Skills

Noa Roman-Muniz, DVM, MS

Experts are Not Necessarily Effective Teachers

Being the best at milking cows does not necessarily make you great at teaching new milkers how to do their job. Often times we assume that an expert should make an outstanding teacher, yet we have all experienced a parent with little patience trying to teach his adolescent son how to drive, or a college professor leaving a classroom full of students confused and in the dark after a lecture on general chemistry. Teaching chemistry or providing driving lessons is not that different from teaching how to milk cows, or how to assist with difficult calvings. Although the skills being taught are extremely different, the process of teaching, of making information available for others to understand and use later on is very similar across subjects.

Teaching Is a Science; Teaching Is An Art

Effective teachers develop their own methods and look for ways to improve how a training session flows, and how to make main concepts easier to grasp. Effective teachers must be very familiar with the concepts presented and understand all the reasons behind protocols and decisions to be made. In this respect, teaching is a science. It requires preparation, practice and much discipline. But if teaching is seen as just science, teaching effectiveness will be limited. Teaching is also an art. It is about telling a story and keeping the audience interested in little details and able to understand the key message(s) at the same time. An effective teacher will create an atmosphere conducive to learning and will find innovative ways to deliver a message. An effective teacher will motivate students and will facilitate a more enjoyable learning experience.

On the dairy, many times we expect the person with most years of experience to motivate new hires and train them how to do their job properly. Do we evaluate that person's ability and desire to teach? What if that person doesn't have the right attitude anymore about the tasks that she or he performs for the dairy? What if that person doesn't know how to explain to others why we

need to forestrip and clean the teats as preparation for milking? He or she may be the best milker, and yet not understand the science behind each step of milking. He or she may be the best milker and yet have no desire or the aptitude to share that knowledge with newcomers.

Training the Trainers

As part of the dairy management team, we should identify those individuals with the potential to be effective trainers. People with a desire to understand the science behind procedures and daily tasks, and with good communication and people skills are good candidates. Effective trainers must exhibit patience and should be respectful and fair with all. Many times, middle managers are great as trainers, but some times, this responsibility will be given to another worker with greater training skills. To ensure a consistent message, the area manager should still be involved in the training process, providing technical knowledge and answering questions related to human resource management and dairy policies.

Once a potential trainer has been identified, that person should be trained properly. Training seminars and conferences offered by universities and private entities are great opportunities to provide trainers-to-be with background knowledge. Background information on anatomy of the mammary gland, sexual harassment laws or common ailments of fresh cows, for example, will allow area managers to answer co-workers' questions during on-farm training sessions.

Why is “Why” So Critical?

One critical aspect of properly training the trainers is to explain to them the “why” behind decisions made on the dairy. For example, if we ask them to train others about forestripping, but neglect to explain why forestripping is important to cow health, milk quality and parlor efficiency, the trainer will lose the argument if confronted with the question “why should I add one more step to the milking routine, if we already do so much in the parlor?” A trainer should always be able to answer “why”. That tells the students that he or she is knowledgeable and has thought through the benefits and possible challenges of a change in protocols or a new way of performing a dairy task. I will go further and say that a trainer should share the “why” with students as a way of motivating them and explaining the significance of their job performance. “Why”, if adequately used, is a great tool for keeping students interested, and puts the concepts presented in context. By explaining the “why” I am not just asking a group of maternity area workers to wash their hands, for example. Instead, I am sharing with them the fact that what we do while we are tending to a dystocia cow will impact her future reproductive health and milk production. I am telling them that taking a few minutes to clean our hands and arms will save us many days or weeks of treating a sick, non-productive cow. Sharing the “why” allows workers to understand the magnitude of what they do as part of their job; it allows them to get a sense of accountability; it motivates good employees to do a better job.

Classroom Atmosphere

On-farm trainers should not only have technical knowledge, they should also understand the power of a fair and inclusive classroom atmosphere. Multicultural audiences can be a challenge to even the most experienced instructors. When some workers are harassed due to language differences, gender, physical traits, or the region of the country where they are from, their ability to learn will be affected. On-farm trainers must be aware of potential conflicts and try to minimize instances of exclusion and harassment by setting guidelines for interactions during training sessions.

It is important to note that classroom interactions will also be affected by the culture of a dairy as a whole. Dairy managers should strive to provide a working environment free of harassment of any kind. If management shows a commitment to fairness and respectful interactions, this will become part of the dairy's culture and will be reflected in teacher-student and student-student interactions.

One of the courses that Colorado State University offers to Colorado dairy managers covers several topics under the umbrella of Human Resource Management. Topics include harassment in the work place, conflict resolution, worker safety, and how to effectively train multicultural populations. It is surprising how many middle managers that have been training new hires for years are not familiar with harassment laws, or with how to solve conflicts among workers in a constructive manner. Our training sessions on this topic have been well received and much appreciated by attendees.

Assessing Training Effectiveness and Feedback

One of the advantages of having on-farm trainers is that following a training session they could provide feedback to the employees in their area. Immediate, constructive feedback is a critical and often neglected step in the training process. Timely feedback is very important, if we desire to keep workers motivated and engaged. Following a training session, follow-up meetings should be held to discuss worker progress and performance. Worker and area performance should be measured by parameters chosen ahead of time by the management team. It is extremely important that workers are able to understand how their work affects the parameters being measured and how their improved performance benefits the dairy and themselves.