

LABOR MANAGEMENT

By Tom Maloney

Six steps to retain a satisfied, productive workforce

Build Loyalty to Reduce Employee Turnover

High employee turnover is costly for most employers and dairy managers are no exception. It cost hundreds – if not thousands – of dollars in advertising costs, interview costs, training time, and other expenses every time an employee decides to leave your business. There is a great financial incentive to keep turnover low. The key to low turnover in many cases is the amount of time the employer spends paying attention to employee needs and building loyalty. In short, those employers who create a positive work environment usually are successful at retaining talented employees.

To reduce turnover and retain a satisfied, productive work force, here are six steps to increase employee loyalty:

1 . Design jobs with employees in mind– It is hard to sustain interest in tasks that are difficult, repetitive and boring. While the assignment of difficult tasks is inevitable at times, job variety is the key to keep employees fresh and enthusiastic about what they are doing. Rotate jobs so that the most difficult tasks get distributed among a number of people.

In addition, try to fit the employee's interests to the tasks that they are assigned to. If, for example, an employee has a particular aptitude for working with equipment or for organizing tasks and projects, match the employee's interests with specific jobs to enhance motivation.

Working conditions are also an important part of job design. Proper equipment, including safety equipment and proper clothing, that will protect them from various weather and work conditions will enable your employees to perform a job safely and effectively.

2 . Create performance expectations and goals – Employees want to know what their job is and what specifically is expected of them. Management research clearly shows that employees who set goals accomplish more than employees who don't. Effective managers work with employees to establish job goals and expectations. Goals should be written so that they can be referred to from time to time and evaluated. Above all, goals and anticipated results should be realistic.

If an employee views his or her goals as unattainable, chances are the individual won't even try to achieve them. Likewise, if the goals are too easy to attain, performance will suffer.

A good set of performance goals provides an opportunity for ongoing performance discussions between manager and employee. In addition, the accomplishment of performance goals can provide employees with a great deal of job satisfaction and motivation.

3 . Provide ongoing feedback – By providing coaching and feedback, managers put themselves in the position to support top employee performance. By receiving continuous performance feedback, employees know how they are doing and what adjustments they can make to proceed in their work more effectively. Employees also want to know why a job is being done a particular way or why a specific procedure is important to success. Explaining why a job is important and letting employees know that good performance is appreciated, will help you build employee loyalty.

Effective managers also provide encouragement when needed. Higher levels of performance can be achieved when the employee knows that the manager has confidence in him or her, and that the manager will help them succeed at a difficult task.

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FYI

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THE MANAGER

4 Listen – Listening is perhaps the most important aspect of communication for a manager or supervisor. Effective managers make it clear that they want their employees' feedback and that their comments about the workplace and job performance are welcome any time. Employees often have suggestions about how work can be performed more effectively and those suggestions should be heard and considered by managers and supervisors. Effective managers recognize that no one knows more about a job and the challenges of doing a job than the individual who performs that job every day.

Listening is an important way to show respect for employees' contributions, abilities and ideas. Managers who put priority on taking the time to listen are more likely to identify improvements in job design and performance and earn the respect of those they supervise.

5 Provide training and development opportunities – Generally speaking, people want to improve their performance and want to become more competent than they are today. They want to grow, learn and become more valuable to themselves as well as to a current or future employer. In addition, employees enjoy doing what they do well. An ongoing process of training and development for each employee will reap big dividends.

Training can be conducted internally or off-site. Many effective dairy managers have made very good use of video tapes and other teaching materials at the workplace to give employees the skills they need to do a job effectively. Regardless of how training is done, it is important to reinforce training on the job on a daily and weekly basis, until the employee has mastered a particular skill.

Some managers fail to get the best results from their training dollars because there is no follow-up to reinforce training. This is especially true of off-site training.

If you send an employee to a class or seminar off the farm, be sure to that a manager or supervisor meets with the person following the training to discuss what was taught and how it can be implemented on the job.

6 View your compensation package as a total reward system – Nonmonetary compensation includes benefits that do not have tangible value: job security, flexible hours, opportunity for growth, recognition and friendship. Monetary compensation includes wages and benefits such as insurance, retirement programs and paid leave.

The challenge for any manager is to develop the right combination of monetary and nonmonetary forms of compensation to create an environment where employees are motivated to stay. Selecting the compensation elements that motivate employees and provide an attractive work environment is the key to build loyalty and retain the best employees.

A stable work environment, with low turnover, benefits the manager and the organization and lowers the direct costs of filling positions. Employers who are constantly listening and trying to meet the needs of their employees will gain the loyalty of their work force. They will ultimately lower their turnover costs and create the opportunity to build a productive and satisfied work force over the long-term. □

NYFB and NEDPA Team Up for Immigration Reform.....*continued from page 4*

“gang” in the House exist. The real leader in the House will be Representative Goodlatte, from West Virginia, who participated in a NY House Agriculture Committee field hearing on the Farm Bill last year. At that Farm Bill meeting he heard from dairy and fruit farmers about the importance of immigration reform as one of their first priorities. The recent hearing by the House Judiciary Committee featured AFBF President Bob Stallman who articulated the need for a temporary worker program that works for full-time, year-round agriculture, as well as an adjustment of the visa and/or document status of workers already in this country. In the House, the focus is on coming up with appropriate single sector solutions independently, rather than folding them all together in one comprehensive bill. The challenge will be to merge the Senate and House efforts into one bill that can pass in each branch of the Legislature.

Joint Advocacy Efforts

NYFB and NEDPA have sent a joint letter to the Northeast Congressional delegation emphasizing the need for immigration reform NOW. “We can’t afford to wait any longer,” was the main message of the letter, which was signed by over 60 agricultural organizations and interested parties, including the major Northeast dairy cooperatives and Farm Credit East. This letter formed the basis of a recent joint advocacy trip to Washington, DC and will be featured in subsequent meetings. Both of our organizations are in the middle of

planning for additional lobby trips as needed, depending upon when the various immigration proposals enter bill format.

Have concerns about immigration audits?

A number of substantiated reports and a lot of rumors exist about the prevalence of ICE I-9 audits on farms. If you haven’t taken the time to make sure your documentation is complete, there’s no time to waste. President Obama has shown that he will continue to emphasize border security through employer/worksites enforcement. Audits and deportations are higher during his term than in the terms of any other President. A number of resources are available, including NEDPA and NYFB I-9 compliance webinars, available online in the member only section at www.nyfb.org. NYFB and NEDPA also both offer a labor compliance publication. It’s a good reminder of state and federal employment obligations at a time when inspectors are on farms more than ever.

Want to talk to your Congressional official about immigration?

Send an email through the NYFB advocacy site at www.nyfb.org by clicking on the icon at the right side of the page. It’s more important than ever before for the agriculture community to remain united and advocate for immigration reform during each and every interaction with a member of Congress. If this is indeed our “one shot in a lifetime” at immigration reform, we need to keep the pressure up and work together. □