



Defusing Arguments and Disagreements

David Grusenmeyer

Sr. Extension Associate

PRO-DAIRY, Cornell University

People can be so unpredictable!

It happens to the best and most well intentioned managers. At some point an employee is likely to disagree and want to argue about a decision or course of action on the farm. Ignoring the conflict is a poor option at best. It sends a message that you don't want to solve the problem or deal with the underlying issue. It also tells your employee that their ideas, their concerns, or they themselves don't matter.

When someone is dead set on arguing with you, defuse the situation with these easy steps:

1. **Thank the person for their interest**, concern, comments or input to the situation - - even if the comments were shouted at you. The attack is not personal so don't take it that way. The frustration, concern or anger is with the situation. Keep your cool and don't lash out, even when being berated.
2. **Start your response with the phrase:** "Let me see if I understand you correctly." Then restate the person's argument as completely and accurately as you can. If you are incorrect in your restatement allow them to correct you and again restate your understanding back to them. This will do three things: 1) It gives the person time to clam down, 2) Gives you the chance to further process and understand what was said; and 3) It shows you are truly listening and taking their concerns seriously.
3. **Find at least one thing in their argument that you can agree with.** Even if you believe their argument as a whole is nonsense, pick out at least one point you can agree with. By conceding a point or up front you show that you're not defensive about the situation and really want to solve the problem. If the problem is with a third party be certain not to take sides on the issue before **ALL** the facts are gathered from **ALL** parties. You might say, "If that's the case, that doesn't seem right. I'll look into it further right away." If the issue is a result of a decision or action by you, don't duck the blame or make excuses. You'll appear defensive and the individual won't believe anything you say nor that anything will be done to correct what they perceive as a problem.
4. **Ask the individual:** "What's fair? What would you suggest be done?" Sometimes people will actually accept less than we might be prepared to do in solving a problem. It always pays to first find out exactly where they are on resolving the issue before you offer anything. Depending on the timeframe available and what's at stake, don't make an immediate decision. Tell them you'll take their suggestions under advisement but may not be able to follow them 100%.



5. **Solve the problem.** Remember: Perception is reality. If the issue is important enough for the employee to argue about, it's a problem in their mind and you need to deal with it. In a timely fashion, either solve the problem, or educate the employee to help them better understand the situation and the reasons things must be as they are.

Smart managers need not fear complaints and arguments from employees. It shows that employees care enough to want to improve things rather than just quit and leave. It's also an opportunity for good managers to shine by taking employee suggestion to improve the operation, turning a negative into a positive, and increasing employee loyalty to the farm.