



Motivating When Jobs are Dull

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Fredrick Herzberg, a motivational theorist, once said, if we want to motivate people to do their jobs better we need to give them more interesting jobs to do. Both common sense and research tells us that this is true, it's called job enrichment. The question is, with intrinsically boring jobs like milking, how do we make the work more interesting?

Keep in mind that "job expansion" (giving them more work to do) IS NOT "job enrichment" (giving them more interesting work to do). One option, for interested and capable employees, is to allow them to work into record keeping and summarizing certain cow records, then making management recommendations based on those records. If job enrichment isn't an option, what's next?

When two or more employees are at the job site together, research shows that women perform better at dull boring tasks than men. "We like it. We don't have to think about what we're doing and can talk. We have the most wonderful conversations." Having "wonderful conversations" is typically not a guy thing in U.S. culture. However, conversation skills can be developed, so there is hope for the U.S male workforce. Doing a little noise control in the parlor can make it a more pleasant work environment as well as help encourage time passing conversation.

Don't forget the power of talking with your employees. "Look, this work is dull and you're bored. It's a fact of the job and we have to accept that. So what can we do about it that will help make the job more interesting for you?" By talking with employees you'll show you care, you may hear ideas you wouldn't have thought of, but more importantly you'll hear the ideas your employees think are most critical.

Other ideas to liven a boring work environment include: Allowing milkers to swap jobs and take a turn bringing cows in, pushing feed up, checking the fresh cow pen, or even raking out stalls. Most parlors have a radio available, but how about a tape deck or CD player so individuals can listen to their personal favorite music? Books on tape are a favorite of mine because they engage the mind more than just music and time seems to pass quicker, plus these stories can be exciting, entertaining and - heaven forbid - educational. Books on tape are available from libraries, bookstores, some video rental stores, and even some convenience stores. And, dare I say, decorating the parlor and changing the decorations regularly will help make the work environment less boring and shows employees that you care.