



## *Would you Work for You?*

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**Investing in people gives employers a good return: Yes or No?**

**Everyone should start at the bottom and do the hard yards: Yes or No?**

**You can't avoid hard work and long hours if you want to work on a dairy farm: Yes or No?**

### ***“Would you work for you?”***

#### **Background:**

It's no secret - times are changing. Maybe it's driven by the urban-rural divide. Maybe it's the way the baby boomers brought us up...

The current labour market means more employers are having trouble finding the 'right people'. Just ask a High School Careers Advisor and you'll find that 'agriculture is not sexy'! Schools don't encourage students to enter agriculture at any level unless they are of low academic ability. Bright kids are encouraged into 'professional' careers, while the not-so-bright ones might 'end up on a farm'. Even the language makes dairying sound like a dead end job. The view of a lot of people is that working on a farm means longer hours and dirty work for low pay!

Other contributing factors are the more 'high tech' we get the more skills and ability we need in our workforce, not less.

So what does that mean for us as individual farmers? We have to start doing things differently! We need to accept that it might take a while to change impressions of what the industry offers. Most importantly we need to view our people differently.

We need to be good at managing our cows and grass, and we need to be good at leading and managing our people. For most of us this will mean learning new skills and practicing them constantly.

#### **Understanding People:**

What do people want at work?

- To know what is expected of them
- To know the standard by which you will judge their performance
- To know how they are getting on
- To be kept informed of changes that affect them
- To have the opportunity develop/use their skills

- To be provided with stepping stones

People leave because:

- They don't feel they are learning
- They don't like their manager/employer
- They want to 'progress'
- They want to be paid more
- They feel like they haven't been listened to

## **The Three Fundamentals of Human Nature:**

### **1. The Importance of Feeling Important**

*"The greatest needs of human nature is to feel important, to be recognised and be appreciated"* Thomas Dewey.

The desire to feel important is the strongest constant human urge and is the one characteristic that separates us from the animals. It makes people want to wear brand label clothing, drive upmarket cars, have a title on their door or brag about their children. It's the main reason kids join street gangs.

Marriage studies have found that the prime reason women leave long term relationships is not because of abuse, cruelty or domination – it's because of lack of appreciation. The desire to be recognised, to feel important and appreciated is all-powerful. And the more important you make someone feel, the more positively they will respond to you.


### **2. A Person's Primary Interest is in Themselves**

On a basic level, people are mainly interested in themselves and 'what's in it for them'. To successfully relate to people, you should approach them realising this rule is one of the basic building blocks of human relations.

Some might call this selfish, but in reality, every act we perform in life is motivated by self-interest. There is no need to feel embarrassed about this or apologise for it – it's simply the way human nature is. Doing things for ourselves is a survival instinct that is hard-wired into our brains and has been a characteristic of humans since the beginning of time. It's the basis of self-preservation. Understanding that we all put our own interests first is one of the keys for any successful venture in dealing with others.

### **3. Nature's Law of Equal Returns**

This is an irresistible subconscious urge to return to the giver, something of equal value to what was given. If a person likes what you gave them, they will want to reciprocate by



giving or doing something that you will like. That is when you put out something positive you will, at some point, receive a positive in return.

However, if you put out a negative, you will receive in return a much **greater** negative than you gave. This is a Law of Nature, and it rarely fails.

When you understand and accept these three fundamental aspects, you will be amazed at the power you will have in influencing others.

## **What can we do?**

For a start there are four areas we can work on:

- i. Clarifying expectations through clear communication
- ii. Giving quality feedback
- iii. Valuing our people
- iv. Providing learning and development opportunities

### **i. Clarify Expectations**

To manage our people well we need to be able to communicate effectively. We need to ensure people have clear expectations of what is expected of them - this is another building block of good employment practice. Being good at communication includes; being a better listener than talker, being approachable, building relationships and being aware of your perceptions and how that influences the way you interact with others.


To give instructions effectively, we need to be good at communicating.

*Example:*

*Do your people always understand your instructions? If not, you might need to modify how you are communicating with them. We all have a preference for how we like to receive information. Some of us prefer to read things, some by looking at pictures, and others prefer to have it explained or be shown how.*

An easy trap for managers to fall into is failing to communicate exactly what they want – then get mad when their employees don't get it. *Don't assume – customise instructions to fit the personality and knowledge level of your employee. Try to work out if they have the same picture in their head as you have in yours!*

### **ii. Give Feedback:**



As well as knowing what it is we have to do (clear expectations), we also need to know how we are getting on. As employers and managers we sometimes assume that our people will know if they are doing a good job because we haven't said anything to them. This is not the case! Most of your people will genuinely want to do a good job and please you; they just might not know what a good job looks like. As a manager you need to explain what a good job looks like, let them know they are on the right track when they do a good job, and redirect them 'back on track' when they don't.

Give feedback as soon as it is appropriate: catch people doing things right, as well as constructively correcting those who could be doing things better. It is easier to encourage the behaviour you want than discourage/punish the behaviour you don't. When giving feedback follow these few simple rules;

- Give constructive feedback
- Avoid or minimise conflict where possible
- Stay focused on the issue and be specific
- Focus on facts NOT emotion
- Allow cool off time if needed
- Allow others to 'overhear good feedback', while making sure constructive feedback is discussed in private

### **iii. Value People:**

Keep your people involved – operate a 'no surprises' policy. Make sure they know what is happening on farm and what is coming up and where they fit into the overall plan.


Knowing what relevance the issue is to us also helps us to feel valued.

Before someone undertakes a task it is important that they know the relevance of the situation and where it fits into the 'big picture'. Often the assumption is made that people have a greater understanding of the issue than they really do.

The 'Why' challenge: could people involved in your farm business answer 'why' to the following?

- Breeding policy, e.g. 'why' are Friesian cows being crossed with Jersey?
- Fertiliser policy, e.g. 'why' is the farm putting on so many units of P?
- Animal health, e.g. 'why' is recording penicillin treated cows so important?
- Grazing residuals, e.g. 'why' do they change during the year?
- Health and Safety, e.g. 'why' is it important to this farming business?

The highest urge of human nature is to feel important and to be appreciated. The more important you make someone feel, the more positively they will respond to you. Practice



making people feel important through recognition and appreciation every day for thirty days, and it will become a habit that will come naturally forever. Carrying out this will encourage your people to use their discretionary effort in their day-to-day work; if they are doing this they will be happier and more self-fulfilled.

#### **iv. Learning:**

This is where we provide:

- The opportunity to learn skills and use them
- An environment that manages poor performance

Why is this important? People want to learn, to be paid, to gain skills and experience and to receive feedback;

- So they know they're doing the right things
- So they know if they're doing things wrong


Most people don't deliberately set out to do a bad job at work, sometimes they just don't know they aren't on track.

When farms were smaller and the owner or manager always worked alongside their employee it was easy to learn on the job by watching and doing. With larger farms and employees working with other employees there is often less opportunity and time to learn as you work. To make farming a 'career of choice' we need to make sure everyone gets the opportunity to learn new skills (either on or off the farm). More importantly they get a chance to put these new skills into practice. As an industry we must provide opportunities for farm staff to learn new skills and gain experience in these skills before they are expected to step up to the next level of responsibility. By doing this, we are equipping our people with the skills and experience they need for success. Unfortunately, a labour shortage can see people promoted to the next level too quickly, and then they are expected to learn as they go which just adds stress to the situation.

### **So, where to from here?**

To be an employer that you would want to work for:

1. Start by working out what "good" looks like! Ask yourself what sort of employer do you want to be? How will you know if that is the type of employer people will want to work for? Think of a 'good employer' that you know, and think about how they manage their people. Even better, ask them!
2. Ask yourself: "How important are people"? What value do they provide for the business? What would you do without them? What resources do you need to provide them with so they can do a good job?

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3. Your employment environment: Is it a good place to work and live? Is it safe? Does it make people feel valued? Do you provide good tools and equipment? What example do you set?
  4. Work on communicating your expectations, letting your people know how they are doing, involving them so they feel valued and providing them with the opportunity to learn and use their new skills.

*“The definition of insanity is continuing to do what you have always done and expecting to get a different result”*

My challenge to you is to do something different and work towards a better result for you and your people and the industry. This is a great industry, and if you work at becoming a Good Employer, not only will you attract better people, but you will find that employing people is more rewarding and satisfying than you ever thought possible.