

Every job is important

By: Kraig Peel

Nutritionists spend significant time focusing on ingredient quality and the details of formulating solid diets for dairy animals. The attention is often on the feeder and the mixer-box as a means of building and delivering the ration correctly. Once the feed has been delivered, we use the shaker box to make sure the ration is well-built for the cow and will allow her to produce a high volume of high quality milk. Do dairy employees remember how important they are in being sure the ration is mixed and delivered correctly? Would it impact their job performance if they were reminded about the value of their specific tasks?

A few years after completing my undergraduate degree, my wife and I decided that we wanted to move to College Station and work on a Master's degree at Texas A&M. We had two daughters when we started graduate school. We met an older couple that became mentors to us and were instrumental in advising us on the complex topic of parenting. One piece of advice they gave that changed our parenting style was this- tell kids not just *what* to do, but *why*. They pointed out that our oldest daughter was very frustrated because we would often answer her requests with a firm "no". We began to explain the reasons "*why*" to her and saw a significant decrease in frustration which resulted in increased obedience. I believe there is a lesson here that can be translated to employees on the dairy.

I have sensed frustration from dairy managers when employees do not perform tasks adequately. I know it's possible for people to simply choose not to do a good job. I wonder, though, if employees would perform better if they understood more about why their job was important to the overall success of the dairy. There are jobs that may seem trivial but each task has a specific importance and each job contributes to milk production.

I have been surprised when talking with employees across many dairies just how little they know about the whole operation. As I walk pens to evaluate cows and nutrition on dairies across 4 states, I have taken the liberty to visit with employees about their jobs and how they have the opportunity to be a positive impact on the overall operation. I have enjoyed good conversations with cow pushers, maternity managers, feed-pushers and feeders. Many of them were doing their jobs well every day but at times, it seems they needed a better understanding of how their job contributed to the dairy's success. It has been a pleasure to see the light in their eyes when I explain where a task fits into the overall operation of the dairy. I spend some time illustrating the point that when they do their job well, they can have a significant impact on milk production and ultimately profitability of the operation.

Are we missing opportunities with dairy employees when we fail to remind them the reason why they are asked to perform a specific task? For example, would the feeder do a better job if we took the time to explain why we want the straw to be a certain length for the fresh ration? Would he/she be more attentive to the ration they are blending if we took the time to explain the reason why? They do not need a Master's degree level of detail, but we should help them understand basic rumen function and how the straw length contributes to rumen health and a successful transition. This discussion has primarily focused on nutrition but there are other employee related opportunities around the dairy that are important for long-term success as well. The same principles can be applied to reproduction, health, maternity and in the parlor.

We all want to know that the work we do has significance past just getting a pay check. We are more fulfilled in our work and we tend to do a better job if we feel valued. Take the time to explain again to employees why they are valuable and we will likely realize better job performance that will translate into more milk.