

Communication is Key Kraig Peel, Ph.D.

Anytime people are working together, communication is a key component to keeping the relationship healthy. This principle applies to friends, spouses, coworkers and business associates. Many times relationships become damaged simply due to misconceptions that originate from bad communication. The relationship between dairymen and consultants can benefit from good communication. The dairyman should communicate expectations of the consultant and the consultant should communicate ability and process clearly.

Each dairyman likely has different abilities and desires when it comes to their consultants. Some dairymen have a background that overlaps with some areas in which they have employed consultants. The dairyman may have recognized that the efficiency of the dairy is improved if there is a consultant that takes care of the details in the area while they over see the larger operation. The range in expectations can lead to an opportunity for disagreement. In order to prevent disagreement, clear communication is essential. I would encourage each dairyman to take the time to clearly express expectations to all members of their consulting team. I have had the opportunity to be an employer of consultants as well as serve in a consulting role. I have been in good and bad relationships on both sides. Unrealized expectations are often a source of serious conflict. If expectations are clearly articulated, the opportunity is minimized. Consultants and dairymen must both be willing to invest in the relationship by being honest, committed to long-term success, and willing to resolve conflict.

Honesty is something that we all talk about and know it is important but on occasion, our commitment is tested during conflict. I do not know of any person who enjoys conflict. Some people are more conflict avoidant than others, which has the potential to test our core principle of honesty. The dairyman must be honest with the consultant regarding performance and expectations in a timely manner. If a consultant is not performing up to expectations, it is unreasonable to expect him/her to do better if the dairyman is not honest regarding performance. The consultant must also be honest with the dairyman if there are mistakes or miscalculations that were not intentional but contributed an unforeseen consequence. The consultant should take responsibility by being honest about the mistake and assuring a commitment to not let it happen again. Honesty goes both ways and is equally important in maintaining the relationship.

Both parties must be committed to long-term success of the operation. The definition of success is important. I have seen occasions when the consultant thought success had been achieved but employer was very disappointed. This occurred because both parties assumed success and both views were very different. Short and long-term success must be clearly defined and fully understood by both parties to avoid conflict. Ultimately, it is the dairyman that determines/defines success because they are the owner of the operation. Their livelihood depends on their definition of success.

The dairyman and consultant must be willing to resolve conflict. The American culture has influences us all to become a throw away society. The divorce

rate is over 50%. At least half of the people in the country are willing to give up on their marriage than to resolve conflict. The dairyman consultant relationship is similar to a marriage. There will be times when things are good and times when there may be conflict. I believe that both sides must be willing to resolve conflict to maintain the relationship. The dairyman and the consultant are not married so there can be instances where both parties choose to agree to disagree and that is ok. The key is that the conflict has been resolved and there are no lingering issues that have the potential to spill over into other areas.

Dairymen and consultants are a reality to the dairy business. I believe the relationship can be enhanced and both parties can be successful if we are all committed to honest, long term success and conflict resolution.