

Great Managers Excel at Communicating with Their Employees

(By Felix Soriano, APN Consulting, LLC)

Felix Soriano, the President and founder of APN Consulting, has extensive experience working with dairy producers and has dedicated his career to developing tools and programs designed to improve dairy performance and profitability. Soriano believes that in order for managers to be successful, they must become excellent communicators and leaders of well-trained, talented, and skilled employees. Consequently, he launched APN Consulting to help dairy producers achieve maximum labor and feed efficiency primarily through developing and implementing training and labor management programs. For more information about APN Consulting, visit www.apndairy.com.

Good communication is crucial for successful team leadership. Good managers excel at communicating with their employees, which helps improve performance and keep people motivated. Here are a few tips that will help you to communicate better with your employees.

1. If it's important, say it twice-Not only that, but ask them a question to ensure they got your meaning.
2. Listen actively-Active listening shows respect and increases the likelihood that the other person will share information in the future. Also, watch how people act while they are talking. Ask questions while observing the person's attitude and body language (it's all part of what they are saying). Sometimes, people say one thing, but communicate something else through their body language.
3. Read the impact you have on others-How do you affect your employees? When you speak to them, are they tense? Relaxed? Are you giving them energy and excitement? To lead others, you need to know the impact you and your words have on them. When working with Hispanic employees, make sure you use short sentences and speak slowly. Learn to watch their body language when you speak to identify whether they understand what you are trying to explain or not. Best of all: take the time to learn Spanish!
4. Communicate purpose and meaning-Have a common goal and share it with all your employees. Having a common goal will inspire a diverse group of people to work hard and have a team approach. In some cases, it will give them a purpose to wake up every morning to go to work, especially if they do a very monotonous job. Tell them about the importance of their role within the company and how their performance can impact that goal. The more employees know about your goals, the more buy-in you'll get and the better your chances of achieving those goals.
5. Have a meeting with your employees to share good news- A lot of managers have meetings only when there is a problem or things are going poorly. This can create a negative atmosphere among the workers. Instead, having a meeting to share some good news or to share successes keeps people motivated and in a good mood. You can also use these meetings to share challenges with your employees and give them the opportunity to participate in the solution.
6. Excel at giving feedback-Feedback is a great way to tell your employees what you are looking for, and if done correctly, this will motivate them to improve their performance. Below are a few tips for giving feedback:

Even if the feedback is negative, always start with the positive: "You've learned a lot in the last two months, and I can see that you are committed to doing good work."

Give feedback with supporting data, if possible. For example: "Your feed loading error is averaging 3%, and our goal is to reduce it to 1.5%. I'd like to give you some tips on how we can improve this."

Be fast and to the point.

Be specific. Don't say, "Nice job feeding cows." Instead say, "I see that dry matter intake has gone up since you decided to add water to the TMR. Milk production has gone up because of that, too! Keep up the good work!"

Give negative feedback in private and positive feedback in public.

7. Cut to the chase and be specific-Make sure you have specific goals and expectations for your employees and that you communicate those clearly and in detail to them. Put them in writing, as well, and make certain they understand that they will be evaluated based upon those goals and expectations.
8. Get feedback from your team-Stay open to other viewpoints and encourage employees' input and suggestions. They may have good ideas that you can implement to improve performance or efficiency, and they may also spot barriers to implementation. Below are some instances when you can ask for your team's input:

- Setting new incentive programs
- Improving an existing process
- Evaluating a new technology
- Determining skill needs and training opportunities

(This issue marks the second time that Soriano has served as a guest writer for The Animal Science Monitor. To read his first ASM article, "Motivate Employees by Using These Two Steps," [click here](#).)