

Labor Leadership



PHOTO BY RICK MOONEY

“Don’t forget your night crews, who are the most neglected guys on most dairies,” says consultant Felix Soriano. Schedule a meeting one night each week.

10 tips to manage better

BY JIM DICKRELL

Retaining top, motivated employees is essential to productivity. And the key to motivating employees is the leadership you provide, says Felix Soriano, a labor management consultant with APN Consulting LLC in Warrington, Pa. “Most people don’t leave because they dislike their job, but because they dislike their supervisor,” he says.

To provide a structured work environment where dairy employees feel valued and trusted, Soriano suggests that dairy owners and managers take these steps:

1 Know your people well. “Talk with employees individually at least once a week and get to know something personal about them,” Soriano says. This creates a connection and shows you care about them as individuals.

2 Communicate often. Have weekly or biweekly meetings, but make them short and to the point, with a specific purpose for each meeting. “Learn some Spanish, if only a few words each week,” Soriano says, to show you are making an effort to communicate directly.

3 Tell them what to do. Develop standard operating procedures so that work is done consistently from employee to employee and from shift to shift. These should be in English and Spanish, with lots of illustrations for employees who might have limited reading ability.

4 Listen actively. “Do less talking and more listening,” Soriano says. Follow the 80:20 rule—80% listening to 20% talking—to learn employees’ concerns and frustrations.

5 Eliminate roadblocks. When employees tell you there is malfunctioning equipment, correct it quickly—within a day, if possible. This shows you’re listening and trying to make their jobs frustration-free.

6 Define clear goals. “Establish key performance indicators such as somatic cell count goals or cows milked per hour,” Soriano says. This gives employees targets to shoot for.

7 Monitor performance. Post the performance indicator numbers weekly so employees know if they are meeting expectations.

8 Give feedback. “The No. 1 thing employees want to know is how they are doing,” Soriano says. In your meetings, review the performance numbers. Revisit goals continually, because people tend to forget.

9 Define rules. Have an employee handbook with a short, clear list of policies and rules. What are the consequences for showing up late or inebriated? For skipping a shift?

10 Correct failure, reward success. Correct failure immediately by demonstrating the proper way of doing things, and recognize good work frequently. If you constantly criticize employees without recognizing the good work they do, you will have an unmotivated, demoralized crew looking for new jobs. **D**



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