



Top Dairies Have EMPOWERED Employees

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There is a lot of confusion about empowering employees. Empowered employees have some degree of control over how they do their job and what the outcome will be, while un-empowered employees simply do what they are told. Theory holds that empowered employees will be more motivated and productive than un-empowered ones, and research support this.

In the dairy setting, an un-empowered milking staff just follow the boss's orders. They come to work, perhaps follow a standard operating procedure that the boss developed and handed to them, and leave when the job was finished. They don't worry about any goals, because the boss doesn't share that information with them. Any changes are the responsibility of the boss. Employees in such a situation are unmotivated and turnover is high.

An empowered milking staff, on the other hand, is well aware of the purpose and performance goals of the dairy operation. They have a team spirit of working together to accomplish challenging goals. They learn about dairy management from the farm press, educational meetings, and other sources and bring fresh ideas to the dairy. They even make decisions and plans about how to implement the best ideas in their own operation so that even greater goals can be achieved. Over time such an empowered operation will have a highly motivated and stable workforce that attracts high quality employees. Performance will easily outclass the un-empowered operation.

Empowerment doesn't need to be a mysterious concept. The following graphic shows a continuum of four stages of employee empowerment. As one moves from stage I to stage IV there is a gradual shifting of responsibility and authority from management to employees. The benefit to management in moving toward stage IV is better performance and motivation from employees, not to mention increased time and freedom to tackle larger or more long-term projects and responsibilities.

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Employee Control			
Management Control			
I	II	III	IV
Management Decides, Then Informs Staff	Management Gets Staff Input Before Deciding	Employees Decide & Recommend	Employees Decide & Act
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling • Directing • Management is accountable and responsible • Management is in control • Team members are told about decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling • Coaching • Employees' ideas harnessed as input to decisions • Team members are consulted and have input into decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating • Facilitating • Accountabilities are clearly shared • Team members must consult management before acting to get approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegating • Employees are accountable and responsible • Team members can set direction and take action without approvals

Few dairy managers will ever reach stage IV, but those that do will be truly superior managers. Many managers could reach stage III, where employees are actively engaged and will come to management only for final approval. Stage III managers can have a highly talented and motivated workforce that gives them plenty of time to manage the big issues.

Most dairy managers need to at least be in stage II. If you're not asking for input from your employees then you are not making the best possible decisions for your operation. Those managers who recognize themselves in stage I need to critically evaluate their own performance. Are your employees truly incapable of offering any useful input to your operation? If this is the case, why can't you attract better employees? Stage I managers need to learn to delegate some authority and responsibility to employees so that they can take on other challenges.

The good news is that anyone can move along the empowerment continuum. Good managers are made not born. There are specific techniques that managers can learn and implement with their employees in order to move everyone to a state of greater motivation and empowerment. To learn more about this topic, contact the Dairy Alliance office at 1-888-373-PADA and ask about the MEDS program (Management Essentials for Dairy Success).

Reference

Bens, I. (2000), *Facilitating With Ease: A Step-by-Step Guidebook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.