

Ag Workforce Development

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Motivating the Dairy Workforce Part 1 of 2

"I want my employees to be as dedicated to the success of the business as I am."

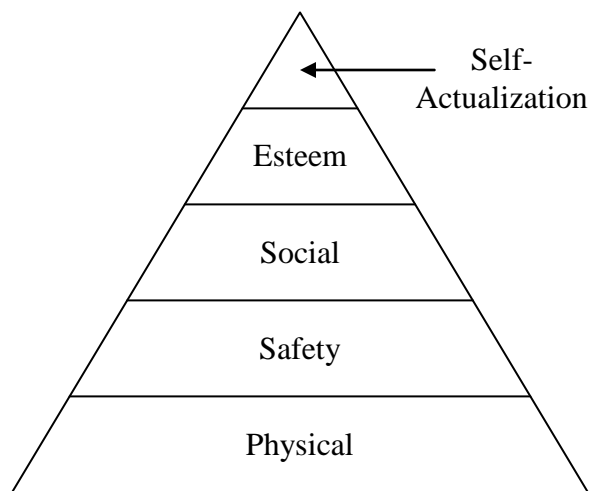
Sometimes it is difficult for dairy managers to understand why others on their farm staff don't share the same level of dedication. In most cases the farm is owned and managed by a family, and usually the family has a long history in farming. The farm family can see how success or failure in the business has a direct and powerful impact on the welfare and happiness of the family, non-family members do not usually share this point of view. Herein lies a powerful motivational difference between farm family members and non-family employees.

For the dairy farm manager, motivation makes the difference between employees who enjoy their work and perform well, and employees who reluctantly show up and perform poorly. All physically able milkers can clean cows' teats and attach units, but it takes a motivated milker to make sure all teats are thoroughly clean. Highly motivated workers will give the extra effort needed to do a good job, not just what they must do to get by. The key to managerial success is to learn what motivates people and then to create an environment that encourages motivation.

Maslow's Theory of Motivation

Abraham Maslow made a huge contribution to motivational theory. He developed a graphic representation of the needs that drive people to behave as they do.

Physical needs are those things necessary to sustain life. This would include food, water, breathable air, shelter, etc. These things must be available or the individual will focus on obtaining this need before any of the other needs can be satisfied.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Safety needs are self-explanatory. Once a person's physical needs are met, the individual must have some expectation that physical harm is not likely. A certain level of financial security may also be a safety motivator.

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Social needs represent the basic human desire to be part of a group. Most people derive great satisfaction from inclusion in a group where they feel wanted and important. This need has major implications for employers that will be illustrated later.

Esteem needs fall into two categories. First, the overused term self-esteem, and secondly the need for respect and admiration from others. Self-esteem refers to one's confidence in one's own abilities. Real self-esteem stems from past experiences of success in achieving new things. People also strive for respect and admiration from others, although many will not admit it.

Lastly, we come to the need for self-actualization. This is the highest and most elusive need for all individuals. In fact, Maslow maintains that many people never seek to satisfy the need for self-actualization because they never adequately satisfy the lower needs. Self-actualization is the ultimate fulfillment of everything that a person is capable of doing. Or, one can think of professional athletes who don't feel complete without performing in their particular game. The same principle of self-actualization also applies to many people who strive to creatively excel in their professional and personal lives. Many dairy producers fulfill their drive for self-actualization by owning and managing a dairy.

Dairy managers can learn to apply Maslow's Theory to improve the motivational climate in their own business. Next month we will explore how to examine your farm's motivational climate and make improvements.