

Motivating the Feeder

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Abstract

Having motivated feeders is a worthy goal for any dairy farm manager. No human resource challenge likely exceeds worker motivation in importance or potential for employer and employee satisfaction. Making both the employer and employee responsible for motivation is a nontraditional approach. Motivation becomes a partnership, building challenge rather than simply a challenge for the employer to find magical things that can be done to or for employees. An employer-employee partnership can be successful only when both parties understand and accept their responsibilities and then carry them out in a consistent and effective manner.

Introduction

Employers often ask, “How can I motivate my employees?” This article proposes a simple yet unique answer: You can’t do it alone! Motivation of the feeder works best as a partnership between the feeder and employer or supervisor. This basic argument gives rise to several practical guidelines for human resource managers and employees to use in improving feeder motivation.

Worker motivation, more accurately the lack of motivation, often frustrates employers and supervisors. It comes as a surprise to some employers that employees’ lack of motivation often frustrates them as well. These frustrations can be

compounded by the obvious fact that most any approach to motivation will sometimes work for some people. The kicker is that no approach works all the time for all people.

Some Background Points about Motivation

Motivation is the inner force that drives employee behavior. The intensity of one’s inner force to do a task or accomplish a goal describes the level of motivation. Two people may both say and believe they want to be excellent employees. The intensity of their desire to be excellent measures their motivation. Employers pay more attention to what employees do than what they say or believe. Motivation is the force that causes employees to deliver on what they say.

Most feeders prefer to be motivated. Why would they choose the frustration of not being motivated? Motivating jobs and work environments win praise from employees. Of course, what one person finds motivating another may find boring, frustrating, and debilitating. And employees sometimes bring a lot of baggage to the workplace from their childhood experiences, previous employment, and failures to find their motivating niches in life.

Motivation is complex. No simple set of guidelines guarantees motivated employees. Motivation provides a never-ending struggle for both employers and employees.

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Self-motivation plays a crucial role. Achievers tend to continue achieving. Past accomplishments, challenging career goals, expertise in one or more areas, pride in one's abilities, and self-confidence contribute to self-motivation.

An unmotivated person can become motivated. On the other hand, a motivated person can lose motivation. The opportunity to motivate employees is neither never completely lost nor is the accomplishment of motivated employees ever guaranteed to continue indefinitely.

Not all feeder performance problems are explained by lack of motivation. Lack of training can prevent a motivated feeder from performing well. What sense is there in hiring a motivated person to do a job and then not training the person to do the job properly? Lack of appropriate equipment, tools, facilities and supplies can also prevent a motivated person from performing well. Lack of clear expectations, unclear "rules of the game", and muddled messages about desired outcomes can lead to poor performance.

Satisfying Needs

The simplest and most intuitive approach to motivation is to satisfy an employee's needs. This approach has four parts:

- Employees have needs that they desire to satisfy, *which in turn*
- Leads to actions that will fulfill their needs, *which in turn*
- Leads to rewards from the employer and satisfaction from doing the job, *which in turn*
- Reinforces their actions and causes them to be repeated.

Note the necessity of identifying needs. An employer can get help from employees to identify their needs. Then the employer can choose the "right" employee rewards for doing a job and especially for doing a job well. Providing the "right" rewards reinforces the employees' actions, thus causing the employees to repeat the actions to get the rewards again.

To illustrate, Kirk and Kendra are employees who both have a need to be thanked and appreciated. Kirk's employer Jennifer, recognizing the need, gives him specific tasks and responsibilities. When Kirk performs the tasks well, Jennifer regularly shows appreciation by saying thank you and giving merit increases in pay. Kirk's needs are satisfied. To continue having his need for thanks and appreciation satisfied, he is motivated to continue to do the tasks well.

On the other hand, Kendra's employer John fails to understand her need for thanks and appreciation. Kendra works hard to complete the tasks, but John never thanks her or recognizes her accomplishments. Instead, John is quick to criticize Kendra's small mistakes. He offers no thanks or recognition for her correction of the mistakes. At some point, Kendra is likely to lose motivation to continue to do the tasks well. The reason according to this simple needs theory of motivation is that no need is being satisfied.

Note also the necessity of an employee being willing and able to perform the assigned tasks. Unwillingness, for whatever reason, to perform the tasks means the link between needs and rewards breaks down.

This simple model of motivation makes clear that the feeder's needs play a critical role in motivation. Experienced labor managers are likely to immediately see practical problems. What at first seems to be a simple model is in fact complex and difficult to apply. Motivation success requires

more than the employer's sole reliance on satisfaction of needs. Reinforcement of desired behaviors and cooperation between employer and employee need to be added to the power of needs.

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement encourages the repetition of desired behavior. In contrast, punishment discourages undesired behavior. Lack of positive reinforcement discourages employees and causes loss of motivation. Positive reinforcement is a powerful tool when used consistently, fairly, and sincerely.

In the Kirk and Kendra example of the previous section, Jennifer is making effective use of positive reinforcement to motivate Kirk. In contrast, John's blindness to the importance of reinforcement causes Kendra to lose motivation.

A Partnership Between Employer and Employee

We return to the basic argument – employee motivation works best as a partnership between employer and employee.

Synergy is the concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Synergy is exactly what we seek to complement the needs approach and positive reinforcement. It means that the employer and feeder working together accomplish more than they accomplish by each working alone. Lack of synergy in motivation occurs when the employee and employer each face the motivation challenge alone. Employee brings his or her self-motivation, experience, good intentions, and training to the job. Employer brings his insights about employee needs and rewards.

The motivation partnership means that both the employee and employer are committed to synergy rather than waiting for the other to solve

the motivation puzzle. The employer and employee share responsibility for motivation, i.e., cooperation not separation.

The Feeder's Contributions to the Partnership

True partnership between employer and feeder in the motivation challenge requires each to understand and play their parts well. The feeder's most important contribution to the partnership is self-motivation. Most importantly, this self-motivation commits the feeder to making the partnership work. Feeders also need to search for job/work environments that fit their knowledge, skills, abilities, needs, and interests. A miscast employee almost certainly will eventually face the frustration of waning motivation. No matter how good the fit is between employee and job, the employee must be willing to learn. Even the most experienced feeder new to a dairy farm should bring admission that "I don't know all I need to know." Even a highly skilled feeder still needs to learn about new coworkers, policies, rules, norms of behavior, and just how things "work around here."

Taking a job with a new organization means commitment to that organization's vision, mission, core values, and goals. When an employee's goals, needs, and beliefs don't fit with the employer's vision, mission, core values, and goals, any proposed partnership between the employer and employee is almost certainly to disappoint both parties.

The employee has the responsibility to communicate his or her needs, concerns, and ideas to the employer. Listening to the employer's point of view is the other side of this communication coin.

The Employer's Contributions to the Partnership

Frederick Herzberg (as cited by Gomez-Meija et al., 2010) developed a two-factor theory

of motivation that makes clear what the employer can bring to the motivation partnership. According to Herzberg, two factors affect employee motivation: dissatisfiers and motivators. The employer has primary responsibility for both.

Examples of dissatisfiers are poor working conditions, unsafe equipment, exhausting physical work combined with excessively long work days and weeks, unfair pay, disagreeable supervisors, unreasonable rules and policies, unchallenging work, and conflict with co-workers. According to Herzberg, these problems must be resolved before motivators can work. Resolving the problems increases employee satisfaction; however, it does not provide motivation.

Motivators are factors that influence job satisfaction and lead to motivation. Examples include achievement, recognition, satisfying work, responsibility, and personal growth through training and new experiences. These motivators turn a feeder from being neutral about the job into a motivated employee.

The implications for the employer's side of the motivation partnership are clear. The dissatisfiers must be removed before motivators can work. Employees working in unsafe conditions with unfair pay will not be motivated by recognition and delegation of additional responsibility. However, making the workplace safe and increasing the pay to a fair level is not enough. These steps alone will fail to motivate employees. They will be satisfied but not motivated. These neutral workers can be turned into satisfied and motivated workers by using the motivators, e.g., recognition and delegation of additional responsibility. Each employer can work to identify the dissatisfiers among his or her employees. Removing the dissatisfiers provides opportunity to take advantage of motivators.

Communication with employees is essential. What is a dissatisfier for one feeder may not be a

dissatisfier for another. An unmarried workaholic employee may have no objection to a 60-hour work week. Parents with small children may find 60-hour work weeks highly dissatisfying. What is a motivator for one employee may not be for another. Opportunity to learn new skills may be motivating for one employee and a worrisome burden for another employee.

Conclusions

- Motivation of feeders is best addressed as a partnership building challenge between employer and feeder.
- The traditional "satisfying needs" approach to motivation is impractical because of the inability of employers to clearly identify feeder needs or feeders to identify their own needs in a timely and accurate manner.
- The feeder's most important contribution to the motivation partnership is self-motivation. Feeders also need to search for a job/work environment that fits their knowledge, skills, abilities, needs, and interests.
- Employers need to remove factors that dissatisfy feeders and then put motivators in place that influence job satisfaction and lead to motivation.

Reference

Gomez-Meija, L.R., D.B. Balkin, and R.L. Cardy. 2010. *Managing Human Resources*. 6th ed., Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.