

Improve working relationships in dairies

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Livestock Officers – Dairy Tocal, Paterson

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Do:

- treat staff honestly, fairly, with respect and consideration. Make them feel an important part of the team, rather than just a worker
- pay proper award wages, including overtime. Pay on time, and include a pay slip. Record hours of work each week
- give each person a clear outline of their duties and what is expected of them. Ensure the tasks they are given suit their level of competence. Be prepared to delegate more responsibility when they are ready for it
- establish from an early stage the lines of communication and responsibility. It can be very frustrating for a worker to receive instructions from more than one boss, and it can also cause conflict and confusion
- have meetings with staff, and keep notes. Outline the work that needs to be done over the next week or fortnight – this can be written in a book or on a whiteboard, and staff can cross off the jobs on the list as they get them done. This can give a great sense of achievement and satisfaction! Explain why things are done the way they are. Encourage ideas from everyone
- give acknowledgment and praise for jobs done well. Acknowledge when extra effort has been put in, or a particularly hard job has been completed
- empathise with staff regarding their personal lives, and show an interest in their lives outside work. Understand that it is hard not to let events in our personal lives affect the way we perform at work. Be flexible (when required) with time off for staff to attend to personal matters. They will appreciate you for understanding
- provide a safe, well-maintained workplace, especially where machinery is concerned. Emphasise the importance of safe work practices, and demonstrate them yourself

Do (cont):

- prepare a staff roster, preferably for at least a month ahead, so people can plan their time. Roster in holidays well in advance. Once you have made the roster, stick to it
- provide staff with opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, such as attending field days, workshops and short courses, and encourage them to attend. Talk to them afterwards about what they have learned
- give your staff variety in their workday, to avoid boredom. Some people like doing repetitive jobs, some do not. Try to share the jobs around, particularly the repetitive or distasteful ones. Think of ways to make these tasks easier or more enjoyable. Be prepared to pitch in yourself at times
- when an employee's work requires correction, criticise the work or the outcome, not the person. Clearly explain how you expect the job to be done next time. Encourage staff to tell their supervisor about mistakes or problems straight away, and deal with it calmly and rationally. If staff are yelled at or abused for making a mistake, they will be loath to tell you about it next time, and may try to cover it up or ignore the problem
- take the time to listen to your staff members. Encourage their ideas and input.

Don't:

- assume that staff want to work as many hours as the owner or manager. Paying overtime does not always compensate for long hours. Enjoying your job and having a life outside work are very important to most people
- use put-downs or personal criticism or other forms of abuse with staff. Don't give false praise or gloss over poor performance at work
- ignore conflicts or personality clashes at work. Deal with the issues, get things out in the open and talk about them. Try to be impartial and listen to both sides of any argument
- ignore or fob off staff when they come to you with ideas, requests or problems. If you are busy at that time, arrange a time with them when you can listen and talk about the matter
- compromise on safety, and never put staff in a dangerous situation.



Consider the following questions

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Do you manage your employees well?			
Do you believe labour management is an important skill?			
Do you find it difficult to attract and keep good employees?			

How can you improve in this area of labour management?

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