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Communication on Farm

After the recent busy time on farm with calving and mating, people often ask me about how to get staff back on board and motivated, or how to tackle a discipline issue? The first key to all of this is communication.

We are not that good at it and 'situations' often arise from miscommunication. Employees don't always realise what it takes to run a farm and the various pressures that can mount up quickly between weather, payouts, share prices and banks. So to help them understand these parts of your business communicate the farm values and goals to them. Let them know what they do can make a difference to the farm, this develops a stronger and healthier working environment for all concerned, and how this can benefit them. When everyone is working well together and they all understand what they are aiming to achieve, it strengthens the trust and bonds within the team, the staff, managers and /owners.

Here are some communication tips that I have found most helpful!

1. Make sure you and your team meets at least once a week to talk farm. Perhaps weekly "coffee" meetings take a notebook and keep a good record of what you cover.
2. Remember clear communication is important; the art of being understood is in the delivery. Using feedback loops, ask the team members to repeat back to you their understanding of what has been tabled or discussed; this is a quick and efficient way to ensure they have taken on board what you have said. Ask open questions, for example "What will their next steps be?"
3. Watch how they react to what you are saying; use words they will easily understand. Don't rush through things, be clear and concise. Be wary of the person who always says "yes" when you ask "have they got it", as a quick reply of "Yes" is often due to them feeling embarrassed about saying "No", so make them feel comfortable in letting you know that they haven't got it!!
4. Have a clear agenda and outcomes in mind before you begin, be constructive and supportive, but direct.
5. LISTEN - Staff will often have suggestions, ideas or even answers to overcoming the issues you may have, so encourage their input. Good staff are usually keen to contribute. "Listening is a vital skill and needs practice".
6. Give people your full attention - No matter how busy you are. It is important they feel heard and you are seen to be engaging.
7. Delivery what you have to say in a positive manner, this is huge! Negative language affects us all; it affects how we perceive others and how your staff see themselves.

If you have any questions or concerns around this or any other employment issue then give me a call. John Brosnan, Human advisor at CooperAitken Accountants, Morrinsville, Matamata and Thames, DDI 07 889 8838 or email john@cooperaitken.co.nz.
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