

I have been involved in fresh thinking around relationships.

I have been involved in some interesting and challenging projects over the last couple of months. My work is becoming increasingly global -- both from an international perspective and participation in a number of projects at industry level.

I am very much enjoying contributing to the thinking around Dairy Australia's "The People and Dairying" project designed to better equip the dairy sector for success with staff selection and management. The invitation to assist with application of this for projects driven by Dairy Tasmania provides a practical challenge to test the theory.

There has been a similar environment in my New Zealand work. I am continuing to work closely with Dave Hadfield whose knowledge of the primary sector combined with involvement in elite sports is offering some quality insights about relationship management. This is all challenging some long held perspectives and beliefs and opening new opportunities to add value around staff management.

Heading performance reviews

Perhaps the next growth area for farming and many farming employers is to better embrace the process of performance reviews and giving feedback to staff regarding expectations.

I have long promoted this process. Until recently my approach has been to carry out appraisals a couple of times per year. This more formal approach has been an opportunity to "stop the clock" and review from everyone's point of view.

I now realise this can be even more effective if carried out on a more frequent but informal basis. That's where I'm learning from the sports environment.

Successful teams have a strong focus on regular review. The post-match evaluation of performance and restatement of goals and expectations translates to a more natural and spontaneous style of self-management. Players see the review process as routine. Rather than feeling as if they are put under the spotlight - they see them as an opportunity to grow in their understanding of what constitutes a win for them and the team.

Values are vital

This style only works if there is joint commitment to team goals. Underpinning these are the values of the team and the organisation they represent. I'm working much more intensively in this area with farming teams to better connect the vision of the business owners with the day to day focus of all involved.

This has meant a new level of motivation and meaning to the staff involved. Rather than relying on policies and protocols, the focus on culture is bringing a self-governing, self-directing style that breaks down the barriers of uncertainty or incomplete information.

The opportunity to spend quality time reviewing performance with clear knowledge of what everyone is trying to achieve adds significant energy to the operation. The

values of the organisation are not just about the business owners. They encompass the whole team's objectives so "win/win" becomes much more achievable.

Team talk

This style of management translates to much more effective team dynamics.

A common frustration for most employers and supervisors is getting commitment from the team to staff meetings and planning. I now realise that many adopt a potentially uninteresting approach that is solely focused around logistics and minimal information.

As in all quality relationships this "head talk" is neither interesting on its own or sufficient to motivate. It will only be of value if accompanied by regular "heart talk" to reinforce values, deal with frustrations, celebrate satisfactions and explore new challenges.

Anyone who tells me they are struggling with their staff meetings would be well advised to reassess their meeting agenda and evaluate how much this promotes values and vision compared to simply exchanging information through management briefings. Sure there is a place for both but don't overlook the vigour of values talk!

Getting this balance right is the key to success with teams. I am learning that it's less about formality and more about simplicity and fun. The connection of hearts and minds contributes much more to the bottom line than only concentrating on what is achieved by arms and legs!.

There is a lot of good information available about "The People and Dairying" project on Dairy Australia's website <http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au>

Call Dave Hadfield, Mark Smith and Pauline to check that this is okay as an article.