

# Keeping the Team on Board

Prime time for staff selection and planning for next year is upon us – at least for New Zealand operations! There is still plenty of talk both sides of the Tasman about shortages of skilled staff and the challenges of getting the right people doing the right things.

A quick review of my clients suggests the better people managers are in fact finding it easier to attract and retain staff. For some time they've been putting strategies in place to position themselves as "employers of choice" and working hard to build an environment that makes it attractive for staff to stay and graduate through the career possibilities on offer.

Keeping the team on board is about deliberate strategies rather than vain hope. It requires discipline, vision, leadership, planning and commitment.

## **The Value of Continuity**

There is an undeniable financial benefit from staff retention. The costs of recruitment and induction of new people are substantial. Building new relationships and familiarising people with new systems and facilities has a significant cost. A focus on staff retention and continuity pays real dividends.

This will be achieved by everything from the quality of relationships and working environment through to the competitiveness of reward packages, the challenge and career growth on offer and the accommodation and lifestyle staff enjoy. It requires a day-by-day focus that must be carefully managed.

Rewarding continuity is an increasing aspect of the salary reviews that I have recently advised on. Rather than focus solely on performance, we now consider recognition of loyalty for staff who stay with the business. A share in the savings and productivity gains can be justifiably passed on. This may take the form of a bonus paid at part way through the second or subsequent year or on some key event that proves the advantage has been gained by the business. In some respects it's about making it a negative for people to move on. Either way it throws the spotlight on the benefit of keeping people on board.

## **Length of Service & Perspective**

There are a number of industries that have peak time demands like harvest or calving. Unless a staff member has moved beyond those peaks to the less intensive periods it can be quite difficult to understand the rhythm of their job. It's always frustrating to have staff resign just as the pressure is about to come off. Experience in contracting or dairying operations has taught me that a staff member who completes a full 12 month cycle better appreciates the less pressured times and copes manage those that are more demanding. Working hard to keep people on board through peak pressures by highlighting the "light at the end of the tunnel" helps them understand the merits of staying involved for the long haul. This is the stuff of leadership!

## **Culture Changes**

Continuity in larger teams is often a long term process. I've worked with a number of businesses over the last year where our sole focus has been to adopt best practice

and achieve a culture change in the team. It has mostly been about setting standards that make the team more effective so the job is more enjoyable for all to be involved.

This process can be severely limited by the boss accepting sub-standard performance from one team member so their load is shifted onto the rest of the staff. Accepting mediocrity makes this the standard for the whole team by default.

Make sure expectations are clearly spelt out and systems put in place to ensure delivery. Job descriptions, team meetings, reviews and appraisals are all building blocks for success. It has taken time but we are definitely seeing culture shifts in the operations I'm working with. These are making it more credible to promote the operation as offering employment opportunities that will compete with the best of alternatives. There is more interest from existing staff in staying and even more reasons for new applicants to join.

Just as you continually apply fertiliser to pastures or service your machinery – make sure you invest time and planning in your team. I know it pays dividends.

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