

Rewarding Staff Reviews

It's been my privilege to spend time recently reviewing management and operational teams. This has highlighted more change and new challenges for employers and team leaders.

The first is the increasingly international makeup of my clients' teams and the need for new ways to communicate, build team culture and deliver career opportunity. The second has been to ensure salaries are competitive through transparent review processes that give everyone confidence we are getting this right.

It's exciting to see the range of new entrants to New Zealand dairying and how quickly these people adapt to their role. The involvement of Asian, Eastern European, African and European ethnicities offers new energy and diversity. Even the briefest understanding of New Zealand's demographics confirms the involvement of these people will be important to our future.

A recurring theme in review discussions is the importance of communication. This takes on the new dimensions where English is second language. It is humbling to hear the efforts non English speaking staff are prepared to make in this area. I am encouraging employers to show their appreciation by a similar level of commitment to increase the likelihood staff will succeed. Strategies range from learning greetings and affirmations to providing flowcharts or systems in their language. More commitment to communication systems always pays dividends.

New Zealand has been built on migrants from its earliest times. This new group of "pioneers" will make a significant contribution to its success and the prospects for sustainability in dairy will be enhanced as a result.

The second challenge for staff management has been how to carry out robust and transparent salary reviews.

There has been plenty of talk about where wages might go given the recent gains in returns for dairying. My analysis confirms some movement - especially at senior levels. This reflects the growing complexity of leadership roles and increased demand as the Industry expands.

I find the most successful technique is for staff to be advised that their salary will be one of the topics discussed in an upcoming performance review. They are invited to bring their view on reward to the meeting.

Prior to this discussion I research and advise my clients the likely market range for each position and these are documented prior to the meeting.

Having discussed the staff member's performance and reviewed the role for next season, the staff member is invited to disclose their view of where their salary should be. This is done before disclosing my recommended market range.

The employer is then able to consider any difference and decide where the reward level should be.

If the employee's expectation is below the market assessment it is most likely the salary will be set at the recommended level. If there is a significantly higher expectation from staff, there will need to be further discussion.

Salary reviews can be unsettling - especially for employers trying to balance budgets against the risk of not meeting the needs of good people. Independent advice, thorough research of the market and context provided by performance reviews enable the parties achieve mutual gain. I'm confident this is enhanced by my independent input to ensure a quality discussion.

There has not been one instance and the many reviews I have carried out where staff expectations have been significantly above market rates. Experience has shown me that quality people are realistic - especially when engaged in a transparent process that deals with facts not fiction.

These days spent in the engine room of my clients operations are some of the most rewarding. They are a timely reminder to me of the intellectual and physical dedication all parties commit to business and career success in a dynamic Industry.

Kerry Ryan is a Tauranga based Agribusiness Consultant. You can contact him at www.kerryryan.co.nz