

## **The interview Experience**

Over the next couple of the months many dairy operations will select staff for the coming season. Making good decisions now will promote productivity, profit and job satisfaction for the future. Treating an interview simply as an information gathering exercise risks relationship breakdowns and drains on energy when the pressure comes on – especially over calving and mating.

I still see too many employment relationships falter because they should never have been formed in the first place. A mismatch of personalities and selection of staff with inappropriate attitudes are common reasons for inability to deliver expectations.

Effective interviews are critical to sound selection. They should build on an experience of the person – not simply information. This requires preparation and communication to fully evaluate each applicant and secure mutual success.

### **Experience the Applicant**

Interviewing is more than information gathering. Many focus too much on skills and experience despite the most likely predictor of success being an applicant's attitude and personality.

Attitude is about the way things are done rather than what is done. For example, punctuality may require the skill of time management. It will not be achieved without an attitude of enthusiasm and self-organisation. Open communication requires a skill of conversation or written reporting. This will not materialise without an attitude of cooperation and openness.

I regard attitude as a fundamental ingredient of a successful relationship. This is something you can prove by observing how an interview unfolds, getting people to complete tasks at interview and thorough reference checks. Leave nothing to chance in this area.

### **Pick compatible personalities**

Personality styles reflect the natural talents and giftings of each applicant. They fall into four categories. The two stronger and more dominant personalities usually find it more natural to proactively lead others, make quick and intuitive decisions and adapt to change. The two more reserved personality styles try to resolve conflict through relationship and lead people in a more passive way. These personalities are often slower to change and embrace new ways.

Identifying an applicant's personality style is a real advantage. It enables evaluation of their compatibility with the personality style of their future employer or supervisor as well as their ability to meet the demands of the position.

There's plenty of good reading on this topic and you'll find it mentioned at many conferences and workshops. My strong recommendation is for all employers to learn how to assess personality style as part of the selection process.

### **Training & Experience**

Formal training and past experience obviously must meet the base requirements of each position. They must, however, be accompanied by a positive attitude and personality match.

My experience has been that those with constructive attitudes and the right personality will compensate any lack of skills by adapting quickly and responding to challenge.

Surprisingly, many employers still place the greatest weighting on experience and skill sets. It's important to '*think again*' about the balance here.

### **Show Don't Tell**

Interviews should challenge applicants to demonstrate their competencies and illustrate their attitude and personality. This means getting people to do things at interview. Tasks could range from calculations and evaluation of technical decision making to getting the person out on the farm to work with you for a short while.

I have found prepared verbal questions, problem solving worksheets and practical tasks all have a role to play.

This approach to interviewing may seem complicated and compared to past decisions made by some on the quality of a handshake and first impressions. However, staff selection and management are now basic building blocks for success.

The old saying "*decide in haste – regret at leisure*" has real relevance for this key area of management.

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