



This is the second article in a series about training and developing dairy husbandry, business and people management skills.

**E**ven in the current economic climate, money isn't everything when it comes to motivation. "The salary has to be right - it has to reflect the skills required to do the job. If it's not, it has the potential to be a big de-motivator," says LKL's George Gordon. But, that said, he also stresses that if staff are demotivated and/or you're struggling to retain good staff and build a team then throwing money at the problem is not the answer.

"The reason why people do or don't stay in a job is very rarely money. That's surprisingly low down on the list of priorities for many staff."

Finding out what does motivate staff is all down to good communication. And good communication is, in itself, a motivator.

"It's all about feeling valued and involved and, therefore, staff must know what's going on on the unit. It can be demotivating if they feel that things are going on above their heads - they have to feel included to feel valued. So talk to them and keep them in the loop. Being involved also gets them to 'buy in' to what's going on and to making sure that any changes made to managing the herd, for example, are a success."

### Demotivating factors

Because different things motivate different people, Mr Gordon says that a good starting point for any team manager is to make sure they remove as many of the factors, if not all, that demotivate staff.

"If a problem with accommodation or machinery/equipment on the farm is reported then, wherever possible, get it fixed - it shows that you are listening and care about your staff and their living and working conditions."

He says it sounds simple, but this attention to legitimate problems is often overlooked and it's often cited as a reason for resignation.

"Obviously some things can't be fixed quickly or easily. And in this instance communication is key again. Outline



George Gordon: "The reason why people do or don't stay in a job is very rarely money"



Peter Jack: "Saying thank you costs nothing, but keeps people motivated"

**Keeping your staff motivated is key to keeping them happy, productive and part of your efficient and highly skilled team. But what stimulates employees and how can you make sure they don't become de-motivated? We spoke to three experts to find out.**

what you can do and what you can't do and communicate it well.

"Talk to the team about, for example, why they have to manage the best they can with a less than efficient parlour for another year and be honest about the timescales involved. Show that you have taken their concerns and frustrations on board and that you empathise. Let them know you've taken the time to look for a solution and that although you can't offer one right now that you are working on it."

Even with formal exit interviews, which are often carried out by large employers

as best practice, it's impossible to be sure of the real reasons for de-motivation resignations.

So says Juliet Price, director of Essex-based Park City, a national business that specialises in human resources, health and safety, and training and development services.

"Staff will often default to the easy answer of pay or conditions, but in our experience these are not typically the main drivers," explains Mrs Price.

Reviewing typical comments from exit interviews, working conditions and long hours are often cited. As are lack

of training and personal investment. "Training is critical to motivate staff. You're investing in them, so they feel valued - they're an asset."

### New skills

And training should be about developing new skills or refreshing old ones. "But it does not always need to be business related. Time off for staff to attend training that they want for their personal life can also motivate and act as a reward."

Additional responsibilities can also motivate some staff, but these have to be appropriate and given to the right people and remuneration must also reflect any major additional responsibilities. "Someone who is ambitious and wants to get on will thrive if given more responsibility. And even more junior members of staff may get a boost if asked to take charge of a particular aspect of running the herd. Again it's all about

good communication and management," says George Gordon.

Targets can motivate staff: "But they have to be 'smart' - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound," says Juliet Price. "And regular monitoring and feedback is also vital - without them, setting targets is a pointless, and therefore demotivating, exercise," adds Mr Gordon.

Often overlooked, but the best motivator by far, is praise. Mr Gordon says that herd managers and owners are notoriously bad at giving it. "There's a lot of grumpiness on dairy farms - perhaps it's all the early starts - but praise for a job well done costs nothing and has the most dramatic effect on staff performance."

He adds that it's also good manners to thank someone who's gone the extra mile by, for example, staying up half the night to calve a cow. "Again, it's vital to say thanks. And it has to be natural - I'm not suggesting the American style so

there's no need to go around hugging each other, but just a genuine 'well done'," stresses Mr Gordon.

Surveys have shown that 99% of employees are looking for recognition for their efforts - not money. And this is particularly true for younger employees who may be unsure but are eager to get on and prove their worth.

"People who work on dairy farms are not money driven - they do the job because it's interesting and they enjoy it. And praise can make it even more rewarding."

### Thank you

Dorset-based producer Peter Jack agrees. "Praise for a job well done is absolutely essential. Saying thank you costs nothing but it goes a long, long way to keeping people happy and motivated."

Peter manages a 200-cow herd, which is run on a day-to-day basis by a team of four full-time staff, and his senior herdsman has been with him for the past 26 years. "I'm often quoted as saying that, next to my wife, my team is my business' most valuable asset.

And if you value your staff then you'll get a positive response."

Training is high on Peter's agenda, as is giving staff a day off to go along to shows and other events.

He also agrees that good communication is vital. "Talking to your staff and engaging with them on every level is vital. They need to know what's going on and be involved in the decision making process."

Peter has gone a step further and lets his team take ownership wherever possible. "We needed a new tractor, so I let the two tractor drivers in the team research the market and arrange for some tractors to come to the farm on trial. We looked at the prices together and they told me which one they thought was best and, although the final decision was down to me, they essentially chose the tractor - they now refer to it as their tractor.

"I like to give my staff the freedom to express their opinions, make decisions and take responsibility and ownership."

And his philosophy must be working - the team took Peter and his wife out for a Christmas meal in December: "How many businesses can say that the staff do that?"

Rachael Porter

Good communication is at the root of keeping staff motivated

# It's good to talk