

Mind over matter

Positive and good mental health are key to running a business, and dairy farming is no exception. So is your glass half full – or half empty? And, if it's the latter, what can you do to change your mindset?

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Running a successful business is often more about attitude than anything else – people really are key to efficient and profitable dairy units. So says Kite Consulting's Edward Lott.

"Look at two identical units and what's always different are the people running it," he told delegates at the recent RABDF conference. "They're an important link in the dairying chain and often make all the difference when it comes to productivity."

"If the staff and those running the unit have a positive attitude, the unit is more likely to succeed," he says.

"The top-performing producers use their farm's resources – feed, genetics, caption and people – better than the poorer performing farms. They also have the right mental attitude to cope with future change. These factors all determine the maximum profit per unit of production." He says mental attitude is fundamental to economic success. "Attitude of mind definitely correlates with business performance, so looking after your mental health is not an 'indulgence' – it's essential for your

overall well-being, that of your family and work colleagues and staff, and the success of your business." There are many challenges facing dairy businesses – some expected and others not so much. A positive mental attitude will ensure that producers are better equipped to meet them head on and, in some instances, turn them into opportunities. "It's important to 'control the controllables' and don't sweat too much about the things you can't control. Focus on the things you can. "And draw on the outcome of previous challenges, of things you've made it through and changes they may have led to that have actually improved your business. Business management is important, but attitude is fundamental."

'Can do' attitude

Kite Consulting's management consultant Jo Speed agrees. "A 'can do' attitude goes a long way. It's a positive belief that no matter what comes your way or what life may have in store for you that you will come out ahead and that you can make it," she says.

"It means when confronted with a problem – big or small – you meet it head on and take action because you know success is possible, if not inevitable, for those try."

"What you think affects your feelings, in turn, affect what you do. It's a vicious cycle and if you are constantly in a negative frame of mind you will feel negative, your attitude will be negative and, therefore, much of what you do and the people you work with day to day could also be negatively affected."

Holly Beckett:

"Changing your mindset requires focus and practice"





Mrs Speed says that, for example, if we are feeling sad or depressed, we might have thoughts and feelings of being worthless and, at our lowest ebb, stay in bed all day. On the other hand, if we are feeling happy or excited and the future looks bright, we feel good about ourselves and behave in a positive way – with positive actions. Even if ‘positive’ isn’t your ‘default setting’, Mrs Speed says that producers cultivate a positive mindset. She runs workshops and meetings, as part of her consultancy role and as an Farming Community network volunteer, to help producers maintain and develop a positive mindset and safeguard their mental health.

It starts with self-belief. “Take silaging. We know it’s challenging. But if we go into the season with the attitude that we want it to work, then it will.

“We don’t hear producers saying there’s no point in harvesting grass because it might rain. If they did, we’d never get the crop. Producers always take action and move forward. So the next time you find yourself sitting back instead of charging forward, try to correct yourself and go forward. Think positively and be optimistic. Remind yourself that tough things happen but you’ve faced them before and you can do it again.”

She points out that what we expect is what we tend to get. “If we go into an athletic competition and think we will lose then we will most likely lose. So think of winning – think of a sportsperson you admire and them scoring the goal, winning the try, or crossing the line in first place. “The mind really does control the body and when the mind says you can’t win even if your body is



Jo Speed: “A ‘can do’ attitude goes a long way”

capable, the mind will win. This also holds true when having positive expectations. It’s sounds like a cliché, but if you live your life on a daily basis expecting things not to go your way then they won’t.”

Mindfulness – paying more attention to the present moment, to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you – can improve your mental wellbeing. Mindfulness can help us enjoy life more and understand ourselves better. And it’s certainly something that can help producers cultivate a more positive mindset – and boost productivity. “Reflect on your thoughts and put them into perspective by creating the space to do this,” says Nuffield scholar and farmer coach Holly Beckett.

Goal setting

She started the Focussed Farmers project in 2017 after receiving funding from the Frank Parkinson Agricultural Trust. Initially a pilot was run with a group of farmers and agricultural professionals to look at the impact of a programme of mindfulness, coupled with goal setting. Working with psychologist and mindfulness-based leadership coach Willie Horton, she developed an online 12-part video series that covers the psychology of mindfulness and goal setting as an introduction to producers and ag-sector workers.

“Positive attitude and mindset are directly linked with mental health – good mental health. I believe that the agricultural sector has moved forwards, in leaps and bounds, with developing awareness and support for people struggling with their mental health. But there is still limited resource out there promoting what people can do to improve their mental health.

“The project’s focus is to provide a practical approach, offer solutions and provide tools for producers,” adds Miss Beckett. “It is difficult for someone to change their mindset without physically doing something different – just telling someone to think positively won’t work in most cases. It’s not that simple. Changing your mindset requires focus and practice. And that what we set out to help people to do.” |

Additional help and support

The FF programme continues with similar positive outcomes as a paid-for course and the video series is still available for free. Find out more about the project at the website, and see if you could benefit.

If you need help or support, call the Farming Community Network on 03000 111999 or email help@fcn.org.uk.

For more information: www.focussedfarmers.com