

## Engaging Your Employees

Take a look at work culture for a profitable 2021.

What are your 2021 priorities? If you haven't settled on something, I'd like to offer a suggestion.

Now, if you're like most farmers and ranchers, you likely spend most of your planning time concerned with profits and efficiency — and for good reason. However, most business people overlook a critical aspect of efficiency. It's called culture. When was the last time you took a look at that?

While culture might sound like a "soft skill," I assure you it is not. In a past column, I explained how every family or business has a culture — one that is either created or allowed. Allowing culture, aka "the way it's always been done," is easy. It's default mode. Creating culture, however, is not always easy. It takes constant maintenance, but the benefits of getting your work environment to a place where people get along, communicate clearly and stay for years is entirely worth the effort.

### Create your culture

A positive, productive culture is not about improving employee behavior (although some employees may need to make behavioral changes to remain on your farm). Actually, it's about a strategy a leader creates and adopts. One of the most effective ways to

improve culture is to work toward better engagement from all employees (this includes family, you know ...).

The most productive business cultures are those where people are engaged because they know the costs of disengaged employees are high. Research varies on disengaged employees in the workplace, but most estimate between 16% to 35% of all workers are disengaged. This means potentially one-third or more of your employees are working well below their capacity.

I bet you already know who they are ... or do you? We see the obviously disengaged employees — the gal who is chronically late or the guy who whines when given a task he dislikes. Yet, your better-end employees feel the negative effects of disengagement, too, even if they don't share it with you verbally. These are the people you don't want to lose, but risk doing so if the entire team isn't uplifted.

People need engagement in various ways. There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach, which is why it's easy to default to the "allowed culture" previously discussed. But, think back to the numbers; if one-third of your employees are working far below their capacity, what is that costing you?

Realize the disengaged employee doesn't just cost you his or her time.

On the contrary, this individual affects more productive individuals, too.

We see it in the form of contagious laziness: "If he doesn't have to work that hard, why do I?"

We see it when employees develop resentment: "It just ticks me off how hard I work when she doesn't do anything and gets the same pay!"

We even see it manifest in accidents or when someone gets hurt. We all recognize how dangerous working around cattle can be at times, so why would we risk someone getting injured

out of negligence? Negligence is bred in a culture of disinterest.

How have you seen this manifest in your own operation? Take some time this winter to evaluate your employee engagement and the impact it has not only on your bank account, but also on the health and safety of everyone on the ranch. **HW**

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### Five ways an engaged team improves profit

- 1) Trust.** When employees are engaged, trust is earned between you and the employee and between each other. A lack of trust is expensive because it leads to managers who constantly micromanage and even redo tasks.
- 2) Communication.** Engaged teams communicate effectively. Master communication, especially by seeking improvement in communication from employees. Good communicators save you money with fewer errors or wasted inputs. Communication also results in fewer missed days.
- 3) Retention.** Hiring and onboarding require time and money. Experts estimate even for your lowest-wage employees, you spend 20% of their annual pay recruiting and hiring them — not counting training time. Save some of this headache by ensuring employees are engaged in the real goals of the farm. If they support your goals, they will stay.
- 4) Knowledge.** Engaged team members desire to learn something every day. This improves your systems, processes and outputs. Plus, they teach others around them.
- 5) Productivity.** Engaged employees simply do better work. This leads to results you care about, such as higher yields in crops or higher live births in cattle. **HW**