



# Motivation is the key to retaining staff

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**G**ONE ARE the days when a plentiful pool of labour was available to service the employment needs of agricultural businesses in Australia.

Many prospective rural employees are now choosing careers off-farm in industries which they perceive will provide them with a brighter future. The

thought of higher gross salaries for off-farm positions and the perception of having to work fewer hours to obtain these benefits entices people into careers away from agriculture.

Those who do choose employment on rural properties as a career can become disillusioned about their long term plans and career aspirations. Factors such as perceived isolation, work-

ing long hours and hard, physical work can often dampen enthusiasm. For these reasons, staff turnover rates on agricultural properties can be high.

High labour turnover can have a major impact on the profitability and competitiveness of a business. Research has shown that the level of job satisfaction among employees is closely related to staff turnover. The higher an employ-

ee's satisfaction with or motivation for a job, the less likely they will resign. The work environment can have an effect on the performance, motivation and job satisfaction of employees. Armed with this knowledge, rural managers need to consider, and be aware of, the importance of motivation when considering their staff needs.

There are low-cost techniques which can be employed to help keep staff motivated and increase retention rates.

**MOTIVATION LEVELS:** Managers need to understand what motivation involves. Managers cannot motivate anyone, employees motivate themselves. All they can do is set the scene that will encourage people to do their best.

They need to be aware that employees are motivated by both external and internal forces. External motivation can be given by the employer through incentives such as increases in pay, promotions and compliments which are independent of the task performed.

Internal rewards are developed by the employees themselves. These include the feeling of accomplishment after completing an interesting and challenging task. An example of this may be the feeling a jackeroo has when he breaks in his first horse. The jackeroo is motivated by the pleasure of the task.

Managers can manipulate the external rewards to motivate their staff, but unfortunately managers cannot increase the level of internal motivation in employees. Therefore, property managers recruiting staff need to make sure the employees are internally motivated. They need to employ the keen workers.

**FAIRNESS AND EQUITY:** Managers need to be aware that employees, whether they will admit to it or not, look for feelings of fairness and equity from their bosses. This level of equity can serve as a stimulus for an employee to either increase or decrease effort. Employees monitor the equity or inequity between themselves and other workers. For example, they compare the visible rewards such as their pay rates, work conditions, promotions and specific jobs they get to perform.

Inequity can cause a lack of motivation and thus a potential problem for the business. For example, two jackeroos who both enjoy performing stock work

are employed at the same level of the award and at the same rate of pay. One of the jackeroos is very good with stock and so gets rewarded by being involved in more mustering work. The second jackeroo who is not as good with a horse and stock gets punished by completing less stock work and being forced to do more shed cleaning and maintenance work. If left undetected, the second jackeroo will start to lose motivation and enthusiasm and may

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think of finding other employment.

**GOAL SETTING:** One simple way a manager can motivate, and possibly increase the performance of staff, is through goal setting. This process involves all employees participating with management in the setting of work goals and objectives.

An essential feature of such a program is it involves a one-on-one negotiation session between the manager and the employee to set concrete objectives for the employee's performance. These goals must be specific, measurable and have a time frame. A goal may be that the overseer, with assistance from the staff, muster and brand 1000 calves by the end of the financial year. After a period of time has elapsed, the manager and the overseer meet and review the performance.

It is important for the manager to realise that employees must be involved in setting the goals and agree on the proposed outcome. Managers should reflect on their own employment experience. If employees participate in goal setting, they are more likely to accept a goal, even if it's difficult, than if they are assigned it by their manager with little consultation.

**FEEDBACK:** If property managers wish to motivate their staff they need to be skilled in the art of giving feedback.

Research shows employees appreciate feedback yet most people are reluctant to request feedback from their employer. Property managers need to give their employees (at appropriate times) feedback which is specific, rather than general, with good, clear and preferably recent examples of good performance.

**JOB MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:** There is a range of ways managers can design the jobs on the farm to assist in motivating staff. For example, if an employee is spending large amounts of time in a feedlot completing the same task and finding the activity no longer challenging, then perhaps the employee can be rotated to another job within the feedlot.

Another motivation process involves increasing the number and variety of tasks an employee performs. For example, a worker who normally works in the boning room of a meatworks is given the opportunity to follow a consignment of carcasses through all sections of the production chain. In other words, occasionally these employees will spend time performing a complete range of tasks.

**DELEGATION OF DUTIES:** The effective use of delegation by the farm manager can be a true motivator to rural staff. Think of when a father delegates the mowing of the lawn to his son for the first time. The son has seen his father (the manager) mowing the lawn for many years and the son has identified this job as being one that is important, otherwise why would his father be doing it? When the father delegates the job to the son, the son is motivated to complete this task because the job is perceived to be important and requires a certain amount of responsibility.

The same philosophy can be attributed to the effective management of a young workforce. The manager needs to delegate some tasks, firstly because he or she feasibly cannot perform all the tasks that need to be carried out on the farm, and secondly because delegation will motivate staff.

**OWNERSHIP IN THE BUSINESS:** Give employees a feeling of ownership of the business and most will become motivated and more responsible in carrying out their duties. When setting the 'calendar of operations' at the beginning of the year for a property, it is important to