

Retaining Good Employees

Effective management techniques can help boost employee retention ... and improve your overall operations.

BY GARY PULLANO

In an era that finds growers struggling to find and maintain an adequate workforce, effective management goes a long way in retaining the workers they do have, according to Stan Moore, senior educator for Michigan State University Extension.

“Employees see it as the manager’s role to hold employees accountable,” Moore said at a recent agriculture employers’ meeting in Michigan.

Moore said greenhouse and agricultural operations can become “employers of choice” by recruiting good applicants, hiring good employees, keeping those employees and helping them develop by encouraging their engagement.

With high turnover in greenhouse production, Moore said it’s important to develop workers’ knowledge and skills while fostering teamwork and consistency. Accomplishing those aims can reduce the costs and disruption of turnover and the subsequent impact on morale.

“Employees choose to work on your farm because their needs are being met,” he said. “This includes pay, good work culture and providing a meaningful job. They are personally motivated and engaged.”

That engagement can result in a “voluntary” effort, producing employees that work to get the desired results — not just to do the job.

“It leads to having employees that take initiative or ownership and are trustworthy,” he said. “This creates employees that have a positive impact on the team, as well as on the business.”

Engage and Motivate

Engagement and motivation are increased when workers perceive they have choices and control of their actions, feel they are cared about and contribute something greater than themselves, and feel effective at their jobs.

Moore was part of a project designed to improve employee management through worker feedback.

Management shortcomings identified in the project included: failure to specify goals and encourage employee input, employee-to-employee problems, lack of communication, and failure to provide training and to provide specific positive feedback.

“It’s important to set goals, because employees need context and standards. Goals move us to new levels,” Moore said. “Guess



what? Employees aren’t real good at stating the [company’s] goals. Owners and managers are only a little better.”

He said one Spanish-speaking employee, in response to a question about familiarity with the business’ goals, said “all the companies usually put (up) charts [with the company goals], but here, nothing. We come here like donkeys to do what we are told to do.”

“We believe that in order for employees to be full team members that they need to know both the goal and the performance,” Moore said. “Larger goals should be broken down into actionable items with performance standards.”

Communicate and Train

Goals, or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), should be set, communicated and become part of the training. Employees should be held accountable to follow them.

In determining if workers’ minds are engaged and they have been encouraged to share ideas, the researchers found 50 percent of respondents felt they provided frequent

EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE MANAGEMENT TRAITS

- Involves all employees as team members
- Values the minds of employees
- Develops employees through training and responsibility
- Communicates goals and performance standards
- Provides meaningful and positive feedback
- Treats employees with respect and fairness
- Invests in professional development for owners/ managers

ideas, while 25 percent indicated they have no ideas or they choose not to share them.

Other questions found that good workers want others to work harder and mesh better with their fellow employees. They said this mix could improve if employers are “more serious on who they hire — check their background.”

Employers can't force people to like each other, but they do have a role, Moore said.

“They can involve employees in the interview process; facilitate communication between shifts; emphasize teamwork and helping each other, even at the end of a shift, and hold employees accountable for results and methods,” he said.

The language barrier can be a key impediment in some facilities, creating an atmosphere in which Spanish-speaking employees tend to be isolated from their employer and from English-speaking co-workers.

“Language is a two-way street,” Moore said. “Take responsibility and provide opportunities. But it is more than language. Just because you speak the same language doesn't mean that you are communicating.”

Good communication involves making it a regular habit — communicating with every employee at least once a week.

Goals, or Key Performance Indicators, should be set, communicated and become part of the training.

“Make a habit of good communication daily. Be sincerely interested in employees. Ask questions that make employees think. And listen.”

Effective training efforts should become a focus for retaining workers, Moore said.

“Training is essential for being able to meet standards, avoid critical mistakes and make better decisions.”

While a survey of 174 workers indicated a significant interest in learning more through training, Moore said employers tended to underestimate the interest of their employees in learning.

Training efforts must be applicable, and workers should be taught why something should be done a certain way. Moore suggested using photos and videos to relay greenhouse protocols.

“It must be progressive and repeated,” he said. “Tell them, show them.”

Specific feedback on employee performance reinforces the operation's established standards and holds employees accountable to those standards.

“Choosing not to give feedback is negative feedback,” Moore said. “Provide specific feedback as soon as possible after an action. Ask yourself why it happened. Correct underlying problems and take blame where you should.”

Moore said positive feedback can be “public,” but negative input should be done one-on-one.

“What feedback does is it tells employees what is important.” ■

Gary Pullano is managing editor of Big Grower's sister publication Vegetable Growers News. He can be reached at gpullano@greatamericanpublish.com.

HURST

GREENHOUSE HEATING

Hurst boiler has been a leading choice in the Greenhouse and Nursery industries for over fifty years. Manufacturing reliable and affordable steam and hot water boilers with decades of service. Whether its conventional fuels like natural gas, oil or alternative “solid” biomass fuels Hurst offers more choices with more models to meet your heating needs with a fuel flexible solution.

flex-fuel
SOLUTIONS



hurstboiler.com

The Leading Manufacturer of GREEN Project Wood-Fired and Biomass Boiler Systems.

CALL toll free 1.877.774.8778

CALL toll free 1.877.774.8778



HURSTBOILER | **50 YEARS**

100 Boilermaker Lane • Coolidge, GA 31738-0530
Tel: (229) 346-3545 • Fax: (229) 346-3874
email: info@hurstboiler.com