

# HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE TEAM ON FARM

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This presentation will introduce some of the reasons an effective team is an important part of running an efficient, productive and enjoyable workplace. Then we'll look at how to build an effective team on your farm.

## What do we mean by “an effective team”?

An “effective” team is a team that gets things done.

It is one where people are working together and taking action towards a common goal.

There is a shared responsibility between team members, even with new or inexperienced members of the team. Effective teams also encourage idea sharing, problem solving and have good levels of trust between team members.

The opposite would be no team work – places where people aren't talking to each other, where people blame each other for things they did, or didn't do, or places where there is conflict between people at work and their manager is not addressing it.

## Why should we aim to build an effective team?

There are a number of benefits in building an effective team. When people are feeling valued by their employer and feeling good about their work, you'll see the following characteristics:

### ***Shared responsibilities and ability to rotate roles***

When one person is away, other team members will cover for their teammate. This is also a good way of making sure your business doesn't become overly reliant on one person. By rotating roles, staff get the opportunity to learn new skills and see how their work might impact on other members of the team.

### ***People can become involved in planning***

Whether it is planning for calving or mating, people feel like they're “in the loop” and they know what is going on. They'll understand what is coming up, why certain things are important, and most importantly, what they'll need to do to prepare themselves.

### ***Sharing ideas***

Just because “we've always done it like this” doesn't mean there aren't other ways, or maybe better, ways to do a job. One of the benefits of having new people on-farm is that they may well see

things from a fresh perspective and offer ideas to improve the way we do things. This can especially be the case with people that are new to the dairy industry, or new to New Zealand. You just need to be open to their suggestions.

#### *Problem solving*

An old saying goes “A problem shared is a problem halved”. Involve team members in problem solving. Questions like “if this was your farm, how might you do this job? Or “How might we be able to do this job quicker/cheaper without dropping the quality?”

#### *Decision making*

Sometimes, as managers, we can involve our people in decision making at a level relevant to their experience. For example, farm assistants may be able to choose the radio station when they are milking, or more senior staff may be involved with decisions about rosters. The main thing is that they feel like they have an opportunity to have some input.

#### ***People perform better at work when...***

They feel they have the right kind of support, where they are treated with respect, and they can trust their workmates.

#### ***T.E.A.M. = Together Everyone Achieves More***

By understanding what needs to be done and working together to get the job done, we can often get more done in the same amount of time. For example, having 2 or 3 people collect new calves and bring cows in would most likely take far less time than one person doing the job alone.

#### ***Managing conflict***

A good, strong and effective team is able to deal with, and manage conflict, far better than in a work environment where the points mentioned above are missing. A team where people know and live by the “team rules” can often prevent conflict by nipping problems in the bud.

### **So, how do I build an effective team?**

#### ***It starts at the top, and needs to be initiated by the manager***

To build and lead a team, there are a number of things we need to do

### *Leading with a purpose*

As leader, we need to be clear about what we need to do, and why working as a team is going to help us do what we need to do. If we are not clear on this, it will be hard to inspire people to work together and they will just want to carry on working by themselves.

### *Communication*

We need to work at being good at communicating – simple, clear messages that are easily understood. With a range of skill levels and cultures on many farms, choose plain English, and try to minimise the jargon and acronyms that creep into our language. Have a genuine commitment to helping people understand what is expected of them. And let them know how they are getting on.

### *Have a plan and be more organised*

If this is not your normal style, it will take some practice. If it helps, they say that one minute planning can save 10 minutes in execution. Practice, and remember that taking time for planning is an important part of any manager/team leader role. And, don't worry; your staff will get over the shock!

### *Be a good teammate*

As you encourage people to see the benefits of working as a team, remind them that being a good teammate is a very desirable characteristic. As farms get bigger, employers really value people that know what they are doing AND can get on well with other people. You don't have to like everyone, but you do need to learn to work with people who are different from you.

A Champion Team, will beat a Team of Champions every time.

### ***Follow through and make sure things get done***

This can be a list of "Jobs To Do" on the whiteboard at the dairy, or some "minutes" or "Action Points" recorded during a team meeting. Either way, people need to see that decisions are being acted on and that people are being held accountable. Deciding 'Who' is going to do 'What' and by 'When' is a useful starting point.

### ***Speaking of meetings...***

#### *How often should we hold meetings?*

This will depend on the team (number, experience, etc) and the time of the year. Often when working with farmers and their staff, I hear staff saying things like "I used to enjoy the meetings because I could find out what was going on and what is coming up next. But the meetings just stopped for some reason". Managers say they stopped holding meetings because their staff didn't seem interested. Ask them!

Some farms where 1 or 2 or 3 staff work together all day, just have a quick catch up after milking or after breakfast. Others meet more formally each week or month. Other farms work well by holding a meeting before the next big event, like drying off, or calving. No right or wrong answers here – just find out what works best for your people.

*How far ahead should I notify people? And what if there are no days when everyone is on one farm?*

Again, this depends on the team. I've seen some farms where staff take turns to record the notes of each meeting in the book which stays in the dairy. That way other staff members who were away can refer to the meeting book to see what was covered at the meeting.

If meetings are not regular, you probably want to give everyone at least a few days notice.

*How can I get people to contribute more at meetings?*

They seem uninterested? Ask them ahead of time to prepare something to share at the meeting. For example, ask the herd manager to tell everyone what rotation length we are on and what we are aiming for. Or ask a farm assistant to report on the number of cows being milked in the last day or 2 (you might be surprised how many don't know)

*Why are we holding this meeting?*

If you can't answer this, you shouldn't hold the meeting at all. Sometimes it might be better to just get on with the job and talk to them as you work alongside them, or simply write on the whiteboard at the dairy. Even a text message may do the trick if it is simply a matter of making sure something happens.

If there is a need to meet, then by all means do, but don't just hold a meeting "because that's what we always do on Monday mornings"

*Specialist team meetings*

On big farms, it may be a better use of time to meet as smaller teams – for example, the calf rearing team, or the maintenance/young stock team. That way, meetings can be more useful and to the point. Occasionally, hold a meeting with the whole team, for some of the reasons already mentioned above.

### ***Team meetings – a summary***

1. Plan the meeting
2. Hold the meeting
3. Do the post-meeting work

## **What next?**

### ***Make a decision***

- Do I want to get things done more efficiently?
- Do I want my people to feel like they're in the loop and they know what is going on?
- Do I want people to share ideas and learn from each other?
- Do I want people to have their eyes open and see things that are going on that I need to know about?
- Do I want people to enjoy working on this farm?

### ***If you answered Yes to any of these questions...***

Have A Go at building an effective team. The results will be worth it.

And remember, you don't have to be great to start, but to start would be great!

### ***Want more information?***

Refer to DairyNZ HR Toolkit

A great book called "Managing Teams for Dummies"

Talk to other farmers and business people who have good experience managing teams of people.