

Communication: Sending a message during times of stress

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Volatile prices in the dairy industry are creating critical cash-flow and long-term survivability issues on Ohio's dairy farms. These issues are also likely to be causing significant stress and strain among family members and farm employees. Communication involves both talking and listening. When talking, or sending the message, be clear and concise. Listeners will tune out if you are rambling, so assemble your facts and prepare what you want to say ahead of time. This is especially important when talking about emotional or financial topics.

Be honest, but deliver your message with care and tact. Personality characteristics are important to consider when delivering your message. Everyone wants the true and complete story, but your delivery may need to be tailored to fit the receiver. For example, some personalities may automatically assume responsibility for all negative statements the sender makes. As a result, the sender may want to begin the discussion with a lead in such as "This situation is a result of poor milk prices, therefore we are going to have to make some changes" rather than "the farm is in trouble and you need to make some changes in the way you are feeding the cows."

The first statement in the example above also incorporates the use of an 'I' statement. Another example of this technique is the following statement: "I would like to hear more about your opinion on this situation." 'I' statements are a valuable tool when discussing difficult subjects. These statements are a means of getting your point across without blaming or sounding as if you are blaming anyone. This is also a way to help keep the conversation positive, even if the topic is negative.

Be aware of your nonverbal communication. Managers' gestures, moods, actions, stressed appearance, etc., can

be misinterpreted by employees and/or family members. The manager may be saying one thing, but their actions are telling a completely different story.

Some other common problems that hinder effective communication include:

- Judging – projecting our own interpretation or judgment into someone else's message
- Criticizing – belittling another person's feelings or opinions
- Blaming – making it someone else's fault
- Name calling – used as an attempt to win an argument rather than resolve the issue
- Labeling – "the main problem around here is that you're just plain lazy"
- Moralizing – telling others what they 'should,' or 'should not' or 'ought' and 'ought not' do
- Advising – "If I were you, this is what I would do..."

To learn more about improving communication, see DIBS# 21-15 Listening During Times of Stress and DIBS# 19-15 Communication During Times of Stress, which are available on-line at <http://dairy.osu.edu>.

References

- Erven, Bernie. 2001. Overcoming barriers to communication. The Ohio State University. [http://aede.osu.edu/sites/aede/files/publication_files/Overcoming Barriers to Communication.pdf](http://aede.osu.edu/sites/aede/files/publication_files/Overcoming%20Barriers%20to%20Communication.pdf)
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