

Taking the lead on safety

Leadership as a non-technical skill in farming

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NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS IN AGRICULTURE

What is LEADERSHIP?

Leadership has three main aspects:



Influence: A leader seeks to influence, and guide, the behaviour of others. They might lead by example (showing others what to do by doing it themselves), talk workers through a task or provide guidelines.



Goals: A leader usually has a goal, such as cutting silage, or moving cattle, in mind. Their aim is to organise their team to complete the goal.



Training: Leadership includes ensuring that all of the workers are trained and competent to do their tasks safely and effectively.

On a farm it will usually be the farm owner or manager who will engage in leadership behaviours. Their attitudes and behaviours will influence how workers approach tasks, including their attitude to **safety**.

What can leaders do to enhance safety?¹



Support safety initiatives (this might be participation in a new training programme, or taking on new guidelines from safety organisations).



Emphasise that safety is more important than productivity. It's better to be a little late, or a little less productive, than risk an accident.



Ensure that regulatory guidelines are followed at all times. This will include confirming that all workers are up to date with their training.



Demonstrate commitment to safety: purchase safety equipment, model safe behaviours, listen to worker concerns about safety and implement change where required.

Lapses in leadership²

Take a look at some of these examples of poor leadership behaviours so you know what to avoid...

- ▶ Aggressive or rude behaviours. Yelling, throwing objects, being abrupt. These behaviours can lead to staff becoming stressed and becoming less willing to speak up about problems, workers may also become frustrated or be unable to manage conflict within their teams. This could compromise team performance and communication.
- ▶ Passive leadership behaviours such as failure to monitor staff, lack of awareness of staff safety behaviours, and failure to notice problems until a worker reports the issue to them.

Leaders of this type are unlikely to support safety, or ensure that staff are working safely and effectively.

- ▶ Setting strict deadlines, or allocating additional tasks, without consideration for current workload. These behaviours can lead to workers becoming stressed and / or fatigued, which can lead to errors occurring.
- ▶ Lack of support for employees. This can include failure to provide training, lack of help or assistance, lack of encouragement and failure to consider worker well-being. In this case employees are unlikely to approach their manager when they need help, and so issues related to safety may go unreported.



Why is **LEADERSHIP** important for safety in farming?

Leadership has been identified as a vital aspect of safety climate in industry.³ Safety climate is the perception of safety by the workforce, and encompasses elements such as leadership, the safety system, perception of risk and work pressure.³

Research examining how managers can demonstrate commitment to safety suggests that problem solving

(understand problems, generate solutions, implement change where required), showing consideration for others and communicating about safety are all important leadership behaviours.⁴

A study of non-technical skills in farmers identified leadership as an important skill. Farmers primarily reported the leadership behaviours of guiding task behaviours, monitoring staff (to make sure they are ok, and that they are working safely) and leading by example.⁵



References

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