

# Keeping Employees Motivated and Satisfied

Prevent costly employee turnover by increasing job satisfaction.

Story & photo by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

**W**hether you work in the corporate world or the cowboy world, turnover is a big deal, acknowledged Clay Mathis, director and endowed chair of the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, during his address to Cattlemen's College® attendees in Tampa, Fla., Feb. 6.

"It's expensive when people leave and you have to hire new employees," said Mathis, noting that the cost of turnover has been estimated to be 50%-150% of the annual salary of that individual.

So what can be done to retain employees and keep them motivated and satisfied in their job? Mathis shared findings from a King Ranch Institute survey of 190 ranch employees at 15 large ranches.

Foremost, he said, employees want to have an understanding of their job and what is expected of them. Mathis said job descriptions are a key tool to bridging communication and expectations between employer and employee.

Second, Mathis said it is important to clarify to employees how their performance will be measured. As examples, structured performance reviews and frequent, meaningful feedback provide a means for evaluating performance.

He shared the example of UCLA basketball coach Jon Wooden, who kept diaries and noted improvement of each player during practice. Wooden then shared that feedback with players at the end of each practice.

Mathis said, "This took 15-30 minutes extra, but it was important to Wooden as a coach, and the results showed." Wooden and his team earned 10 NCAA titles.

Mathis added, "By this example there is certainly more room for feedback that's positive in our industry." He noted that doing so with your employees could very well make your operation more productive.

Third — and, Mathis said, "perhaps most important" — employees want to know the vision and mission for the ranch.

"They want to know why we work so hard. ... Without that clarity, the vision of the ranch is left for interpretation," he noted.

## A checklist for employers

From a 2006 research study, Mathis also shared a list of 12 elements of an "engaged" employee, meaning an employee who considers him- or herself fulfilled and satisfied in the position. Would your employees say they feel this way in their current job?

- ▶ I know what is expected of me at work.
- ▶ I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right now.
- ▶ At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- ▶ In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- ▶ My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- ▶ There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- ▶ At work, my opinions seem to count.
- ▶ The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
- ▶ My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
- ▶ I have a best friend at work.
- ▶ In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
- ▶ This last year I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.



▶ "It's expensive when people leave and you have to hire new employees," said Clay Mathis, director and endowed chair of the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management. The cost of turnover has been estimated to be 50%-150% of the annual salary of that individual.

As an employer, perhaps keeping this checklist in mind can prompt changes in how you treat employees — and their job satisfaction may soar as a result.

Now in its 20th year, Cattlemen's College has established a reputation as one of the most thorough cattle-producer education programs in the nation. The program is sponsored by Zoetis Animal Health (formerly Pfizer Animal Health) and coordinated by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).



## Employees want to know...

- 1) what is expected of them
- 2) how their performance will be measured
- 3) the vision and mission of the ranch

**Editor's Note:** This article is part of the Angus Journal's online coverage of the 2013 Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show available online in the newsroom at [www.4cattlemen.com](http://www.4cattlemen.com).