ENCOURAGING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT USE

When it comes to getting employees to use PPE consistently and correctly, many farms say it can be a challenge. For a variety of reasons – too time consuming, too uncomfortable and more – employees sometimes forgo PPE for job duties that require it. So how can managers and supervisors do better? How can we get better performance from employees in using PPE? After all, it’s for their safety.

Most farms tend to use a carrot or stick approach when trying to improve use of PPE. In the stick approach, the employer mandates it, provides training and enforces it in hopes that the employees follow the rules. In the carrot approach, employees are educated on the hazards and how PPE protects them, creating an environment that encourages employees to use PPE for their own best interest.

It’s my experience that many farms use the stick approach, but I wonder if that is the most efficient.

For the stick approach to be successful employers must:

1) Identify the problem. In this case the problem is that PPE is not being used.
2) Set expectations for employees. Have a clear, well-communicated policy that states what PPE must be worn and for what tasks.
3) Have consistent repercussions. Whether it’s the average employee or a supervisor, everyone should be held to the same standard.
4) Apply enforcement. The expectation and the directive to enforce compliance with PPE are put on managers and supervisors.
With this approach, the method of motivation is compliance. There is little room or incentive for employees to take ownership with just another rule to follow.

The carrot approach, on the other hand, focuses on changing the method of motivation from compliance to self-care and self-interest. It includes:

1) **Identifying the problem.** In this case the problem is that PPE is not being used and that employees are exposed to the hazards.

2) **Setting expectations for your employees.** Have a clear, well-communicated policy that states what PPE must be worn and for what tasks.

3) **Emphasizing employees.** Discuss the hazards rather than the compliance with a regulation.

4) **Commending employees for following the standard (using the PPE).** Supervisors and managers that take a few seconds to acknowledge a positive behavior accomplish two things simultaneously: they let the employee know that they are looking out for PPE use, and that they are not always focused on policing bad behavior.

5) **Enforcement as a last resort.** If you cannot convince someone that using PPE is in their own self-interest, discipline may be necessary.

Here, employees are educated on how hazards could affect them. The PPE then becomes a way in which employees can protect themselves, giving employees ownership of their own safety.

Consistent PPE use doesn’t have to be a contentious issue. The important thing is to continue to educate. When employees have a stake in their own safety, it just might make compliance a little easier. mn