Strategies for Employee Retention: A Ranch Manager’s Perspective

Management of people is integral to the management of rangelands

By Jennifer Johnson and Wayne Fahsholtz

On a ranch, as in any organization, employee retention is a vital component of a successful human resource management program. A stable workforce is good for morale, productivity, and profit. High turnover disrupts the remaining team of employees while increasing their workload. The cost of training a new employee can be up to 150% of that position’s salary, and in industries with long production cycles, such as agriculture, training can last many months. Finding qualified replacements can be difficult, especially in rural areas. Achieving high rates of employee retention is clearly important, but it is not easy, and salary should never be the only consideration. A manager must cultivate and maintain a culture in which employees understand the values of the company and also feel valued themselves. Good communication is imperative not only for attracting good employees, but also, especially when individualized, for ensuring that they remain satisfied. An introduction and training program eases transition into the organization. Frequent and thoughtful feedback is beneficial, as is recognizing the importance of individual motivation and incentives. The combination of these tools creates an environment conducive to high employee retention and organizational success.

Cultivating the Right Culture

An organization’s culture defines how employees are valued. If people are viewed as the foundation for success, rather than necessary liabilities, their attitudes and actions will reflect those values. A Purpose Statement is an excellent way to define core beliefs and goals for a business. See Table 1 for the Purpose Statement of the Padlock Ranch, a large cattle ranch near Sheridan, Wyoming. The Padlock Ranch further defines people as a foundation for success with this statement:

The greatest strength of the Padlock Ranch, as an organization, lies with its people. The talented and creative team of employees, managers, directors, and owners provide a foundation to the successful enterprise. They enable the enterprise to adapt to changing conditions, solve problems, and recognize opportunity. A culture of integrity, whereby the people and the organization maintain ethical and professional standards, sustains this strength.

By clearly stating core values, the owners and managers of the Padlock Ranch hope to provide understanding and unity around those values.

In addition to a purpose statement, the Padlock Ranch outlines the personal values expected of employees, which include integrity, loyalty, pride, professional conduct, a positive attitude toward work, and desire for self-improvement. Each organization will have a unique list of personal values, but recognizing these values facilitates commitment to common goals among both supervisors and the employees they manage.

Communication Prior to Hiring

Communication is important even before an employee is hired. Position openings can and should be announced through a variety of methods, including word of mouth,