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Consulting Services

The Importance of Establishing a Routine

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I have recently been working on re-evaluating some of my personal and work-related routines. I'm looking for opportunities to automate, eliminate or delegate low-value tasks to make more time for values that are a high priority for me such as working with clients and spending time with my family. In my work as a consultant, I've had the opportunity to work with many of the highest performing farms in the world. Naturally, when spending time on these farms, I try to identify traits or characteristics of the farm that are similar to other high-performing farms. One of the commonalities that I've found among high-performing farms is a well-established and carefully planned routine.

Obviously, farm routines vary from farm to farm and what works for one farm may not work for another. The importance is less about the nature of the routine and more about having a routine in the first place and sticking to it consistently. I worked with a very high-performing farm early in my career and I once asked the manager why he got better results than most of his peers. Without hesitation, he replied, "It's mostly about my work routine. I get the important things done every day because I have a routine and I follow it every day. If you visit my farm at 9:30 on Tuesday morning, I'm most likely going to be doing the same thing I was at 9:30 last Tuesday morning and the week before that." His response to my question was both unexpected and impactful. I still remember the conversation more than 20 years later.

So how do we build these routines? First, we start with listing all the routine activities for each area of responsibility. It is important that this list is as comprehensive as possible. I suggest that workers spend a week or so collecting detailed information about the tasks they are completing and how much time they are spending on each task. This process alone can be extremely enlightening and can help employees uncover opportunities to refine their routines to create more time for important activities. The next step is to analyze each activity and ask the following questions:

- Does this need to be done?
- What would happen if I didn't do this activity?
- Am I the best person to do this activity?
- How important is this activity?

Once we have the answers to these questions, we can eliminate some activities and delegate some activities to others. We can then take the remaining activities and work them into a daily/weekly schedule. First, begin with those tasks that must be completed at specific times such as feeding and breeding. Then add activities by priority level making sure that the most important activities are completed earlier in the day and that sufficient time is allotted to those activities.

I think it's important that these work routines must be developed by the people that will actually be completing the work. It is imperative, however, that farm managers and even more senior managers are actively involved in coordinating these routines to ensure they are complimentary to one another.

Finally, the new routines must be constantly re-evaluated and adjusted to ensure that the expected results are being achieved. Routines are powerful performance and time management tools but they must be flexible to adjust for changing priorities and conditions.

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