Applying welfare training in global commercial settings

A Butterworth*,†, P Whittington‡ and A Hammond-Seaman§

† University of Bristol, Clinical Veterinary Science, Langford, N Somerset BS40 5DU, UK
‡ Animal Welfare Training, The Longhouse, East Street, Banwell, North Somerset BS29 6BW, UK
§ RSPCA International, Wilberforce Way, Southwater, West Sussex RH13 9RS, UK
* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: andy.butterworth@bris.ac.uk

Abstract

Around the world, people who care for animals as stock-keepers, stockmen, farmers, producers are placed in a position where they can greatly influence the quality of life of the animals they manage. A stock-keeper’s viewpoint on animal welfare and animal care will be enormously influenced by their cultural frame, how animals are viewed in the society where they live, and how much ‘permission to care’ the individual stockman sees as being granted to them in the place where they work. Sometimes the capacity to care is subsumed by commercial production pressures, lack of time, lack of motivation, perceived lack of resources, perceived lack of ‘value’ for individual animals, lack of perception of animal issues, or sometimes through a lack of knowledge or exposure to concepts of animal care and welfare. The extent and focus of animal welfare training is moulded by the needs of the audience, the company, the retailer or the legislator. For these reasons ‘one size fits all’ training is not usually appropriate, although there may be some general rules which can be applied to nearly all welfare training. These general rules include: do not start by importing values and technology/procedures which those trained cannot use; understand why the people you train do what they do; the initial training should be sympathetic to local knowledge and resources; engage with the industry and its affiliates and if at all possible, obtain government, professional and academic support and involvement; and beware that in the absence of knowledge and training, new technologies and new procedures can create new welfare problems.

Keywords: animal welfare, capacity building, commercial, knowledge, maximisation, training

Introduction

There is no single starting position for the attitude to animals. It is apparent that people who care for animals on a farm or in a zoo or a laboratory, in a kennel or in a stable, are influenced by the cultural frame of the country where they work, how animals are viewed in their society, and how much ‘permission to care’ they feel granted to them in the place where they work. This paper is based on personal experience in training people from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, but it is also apparent from some published work that cultural differences are relevant to differing opinions to, and approaches for, dealing with animal welfare issues (Butterworth et al 2007; Fraser 2008, 2011).

Our practical experience and finding has been that the capacity of individuals to effectively care for animals, particularly in commercial environments, can be subsumed by production pressures, by real lack of time, by perceived lack of time, by lack of motivation, by perceived lack of resources, perceived lack of ‘value’ for individual animals, a lack of perception of animal issues, or sometimes, through a lack of knowledge or exposure to concepts of animal care and welfare.

For these reasons, ‘training’ in animal use, animal care and concepts of animal welfare within animal production has been used to influence and build the ‘capacities’ of animal carers and keepers. Training in animal welfare does not take a fixed form — the type, depth and intensity of training depends very much on the needs of those to be trained. It is sometimes the case that people are not aware or have even considered that training in animal welfare issues could even be of value or interest to them. It is common for farmers, veterinarians, legislators and enforcers of animal welfare to have a ‘starting position’ that, because they already work with animals on a day-to-day basis, and because they already have professional or work-based experience, that they already have a good knowledge of animal welfare concepts. In many cases, people are presented for training not because they have a burning desire to learn and to be ‘trained’ but because it is compulsory, ie some businesses demand training in animal care issues — perhaps as a part of retailer requirements or part of social responsibility coverage. How people respond to compulsory training will, of course, be variable from person-to-person, but there may be some reason and the opportunity to hope that people coming to be ‘trained’ may actually find the process: (i)