

MANAGING FOR MORALE

The rants & raves of a Conservation Manager

A good friend of mine once said "People respond to incentives, the rest is all commentary!" A saying that I ardently support. But working in a government organisation where resources are literally dwindling daily and staff work in extremely tough conditions, how do you create these incentives? I have been taught that the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. This is all well and good within my sphere of influence, but how much of that reality is known to the people who so generously support our and other rhino projects? Well, here goes...

Eduard Goosen | Cluster Conservation Manager, uMkhuze Game Reserve

Dear Donor,

I would love to tell you that all our staff are all passionate about conservation, and that they will do what it takes to save our precious rhino, irrespective of the small salaries they receive and the harsh working conditions. However, I'm sure that you can relate to the reality that for some, this is merely a job, a means to support their family and pay the bills.

Our field rangers (as pictured below) live in remote camps, with nothing more than the bare necessities. Often, staff shortfalls mean that they have to stay in these camps for two months at a time before they can see their families. After six months, rangers are rotated to another camp for security reasons; different camp, same conditions.

To be honest, it's not the nicest or the easiest of jobs. They deal with a lot of negatives; constantly chasing poachers with little success and when we do get an arrest, you run into a challenging legal system. When a team does get 'lucky' through hard work and determination, we can't give the kind of incentives that they would prefer, i.e. cash rewards. As management we do recognise good performance and give awards or badges, but we know what would be preferable.

So what can make a meaningful difference? With your generous support, we have been able to make life in remote camps more bearable.

In the last seven years, we've managed to:

- Supply much-needed uniform and proper military-spec tactical equipment; binoculars, back packs, hydration bladders and rations
- Deliver hot water at camps through solar geysers
- Provide solar-charging systems for all equipment used including digital radios, cell phones and patrol tracking devices
- Purchase solar borehole pumps to ensure a constant supply of fresh water
- Provide shaded seating in camps where there were no chairs or tables, as well as gym equipment and televisions to counter hours of boredom between patrols

...to name just a few.

Your support has enabled us to effectively serve our field rangers, not only through providing them with improved means to perform their duties, but also through the addition of soft amenities that makes life in these remote camps much more bearable. Our staff work in isolated places. Knowing that there are people concerned with their daily struggle significantly boosts their morale. And for us managers, we are boosted by the sincere appreciation a ranger has when they see these extra comforts despite the difficult financial times we are in.

Thank you so much for your support –

Eduard

