

Telling your story: Creating a profile that stands out



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DGA has more than 180 approved Mentor Dairy Graziers in fifteen states. At any one time, perhaps one-third of these farmers are training an Apprentice and a handful are looking for an Apprentice. So the first caution to Apprentice candidates is be patient! Finding the right fit for your beginning farmer learning experience will take time. Putting together a great profile is the first step!

What are DGA Mentors looking for?

Each Mentor has his or her own needs for their farm, so the hiring process is left in the Mentor's hands. Surprisingly, not all DGA Mentors are looking for an Apprentice with a lot of dairy farming experience. In fact, many appreciate candidates who have farming and mechanical skills but they are looking for people who won't need to 'unlearn' dairy farming habits they've learned elsewhere. And when we ask Mentors what they are looking for, the list always includes things like: maturity and life experience, critical thinking and observation skills, hard-working and reliable, a team player, good interpersonal skills, passion for farming, and a commitment to learning.

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Tips for telling your story with your profile

The goal with your profile is to give the reader an insight into who you are and what you bring to the table. Mentors are looking for more than just certain skills or experience. They are also looking for personality and motivation. Farming is an immersive experience that can blur the edges between work life and personal life. Interpersonal compatibility is sometimes the key to a successful Apprenticeship. Use your profile to give the reader a picture of you as a whole person—not just a collection of skills and education.

Upload a photo of yourself

A good photo can create an immediate connection between you and the reader. Make sure you're neat and clean in the photo and if you have a picture that shows you doing something with livestock and/or doing something you enjoy or that's important to you, that's even better!

Proofread your profile

Make sure you use proper grammar, spelling and punctuation. Being grammatically sloppy is ok for texting, but your DGA profile is your resume and how you write is part of what you are judged on.

What to say in your Introduction

Your introduction along with your photo is what will grab a reader's attention. Make your introduction engaging and unique—highlighting your greatest qualities or your passion for becoming a dairy farmer.

Education & Experience

Instead of simply listing relevant education and experience, think about the skills and knowledge you've gained and how they can apply to the Apprenticeship situation. Think broadly about what to include: beyond jobs and formal education, consider including informal workshops, volunteer experience, 4-H and FFA participation. Think about the following categories of skills and experience:

Farming-specific skills: Of course you'll want to include your experience working on farms. Be specific as to skills and achievements. Was it a 50 cow herd or a 1000 cow herd? Did you manage pastures, mix feed, or vaccinate calves?

Equipment/Tool proficiencies: Describe the types of equipment you are comfortable running. Have you operated a tractor or a skid steer? Do you know how to build a fence or repair a water line?

Other hard skills: Hard skills are skills that can be proven or measured. Do you have training on ration balancing or artificial insemination? Do you have business planning or marketing skills?

Soft skills: Soft skills are more difficult to quantify, but are equally important. Some examples of soft skills include creativity, analytical thinking, multitasking, verbal and written communications, time management and leadership. Even if your experience in this area is unrelated to farming, it can be adapted to a farming situation.

Work Environment skills: Are you able to work outdoors under a range of weather conditions? Are you willing to work long days and weeks? How do you work under pressure? Do you work well independently?

People skills: Do you have good communication skills? Do you work well on a team? Are you naturally curious and interested in learning?

Touching on all of these skills somewhere in your profile will help Mentors get a complete picture of your aptitudes and how you are likely to fit into the Mentor's system and existing team. It can also help him or her understand what you might be like to work with on a daily basis. Ultimately, a strong relationship between mentor and learner is the key to a successful Apprenticeship.

Motivation

Your motivation section is where you can bring your education and experience together with your personality and passion and give the reader a picture of you as a whole person. Share why this is the right choice for you at this time in your career and show that you've thought through your goals and have made a commitment to see them through. What kind of situation are you looking for and why are you the right person for them?

Respond to all Mentor inquiries, even if you know you're not interested. It's a courtesy that can pay dividends in the long run.

Location

If you have limitations on where you can go, it's important to make that known, but if you are able to move, be inclusive as to where you are willing to go. This will ensure that your profile is visible to more Mentors and increase your chances of being hired.