Monitoring performance

Performance management is a process, not an event. It operates as a continuous cycle and has five stages:

1. Planning for the year ahead;
2. Monitoring and measuring the employee’s performance;
3. Providing regular feedback – both positive and corrective;
4. Coaching and training;
5. Formal performance review (also known as performance appraisal).

Monitoring and measuring performance:

The second stage Monitoring and Measuring focuses on observing, measuring and recording the employee’s performance throughout the year.

This information is useful for:
- Recognising and rewarding great performance
- Identifying any issues and problems and dealing with them as they arise
- Managing poor performance
- Rating the employee’s performance during the formal performance review

During the planning stage of the performance management process, the employer and employee should agree on expectations and goals for the year ahead, including performance measures and how the employer will monitor performance. Right from the start, the employee is clear about what the employer is looking for and what information is being used to measure their performance.

Monitoring methods include:

- Observation – your own plus feedback from other staff or contractors
- Review of records kept by management and staff such as kilograms of milksolids per ha/cow, mating results, feed wedge
- Review of records received from other companies – such as milk grades, kilograms of milksolids, Environment Agency inspections
- Reporting – regular reporting by the employee on agreed topics, such as rotation length, mastitis/lame incidents, machinery repairs
- Regular discussions with your employees
Employer observation:

Your observations are one of the most important methods for monitoring performance. This will come very naturally if you work alongside your employee on a daily basis. If not, try rotating duties so that you have time to work alongside each employee every few days. Observe how your employee approaches their tasks, the results achieved, team work, attention to health and safety and any other relevant behaviour. If you see your employee doing a great job, recognise their efforts by positive comments, thanks and the occasional reward (e.g. movie tickets). Praise and recognition is very motivating and will help you retain quality staff. If you notice mistakes or problems – or just a more efficient way to tackle a task – share your knowledge and experience. Take a patient, helpful approach and keep things on a positive note. Jot down notes about what your employee is doing well and what they need to improve in your diary throughout the year, these will be very helpful for recapping where things are at during the monthly catch-ups and for evaluating your employee’s performance at the formal performance review.

Feedback from other staff and contractors:

Feedback from others on the farm is very helpful, especially if you are not working alongside the employee. If you receive positive feedback about your employee, take the time to pass this on.

If you receive negative feedback, you need to decide how to best manage this and a lot depends on the particular circumstances. Feedback should always be specific about what was observed and what could be improved. If you cannot be specific about the nature of the problem (e.g. because the employee who raised it doesn’t want to make a big deal or is worried about potential conflict between themselves and the other employee) then it is unfair to give this feedback to the employee. They won’t be clear about what they did, nor do they have a chance to explain their side of the story.

Instead, treat this feedback as motivation to do your own observations. Spend some time working alongside the employee, observing what they are doing and helping them when you see them struggling. This approach helps address issues early and at a low level and also avoids potential bad-feeling within the team.

Regular discussions with employees:

Monthly catch-ups and frequent “10 minute chats” provide an opportunity to find out what’s happening for the employee – what they’re working on, stock updates, machinery repairs, what’s going well, anything they are behind on etc. They are also a chance to trouble-shoot problems and issues and identify any gaps in knowledge or skill.

It’s easy to get caught up in the day-to-day tasks on the farm, there’s always so much to do and meeting with each employee takes time. However, they are important and even more so when things are busy and stressful.