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Employee Evaluation That Works

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“The more feedback I receive the better I can do. Whether formal or informal, positive or negative it's a motivator.”

-- Pennsylvania Middle Manager

Key Points

- ▶ Make your feedback effective
- ▶ Build a feedback system
- ▶ Feedback motivates

Effective Feedback

- ▶ **Specific.** Feedback should be specifically related to performance or particular incidents that can be easily understood by both the employee and supervisor.
- ▶ **Relevant.** Feedback should focus on behaviors or attitudes that have a direct impact on performance.
- ▶ **Credible.** Feedback should come from a trusted source that has a relationship with the employee and is in a position to observe performance

Effective Feedback, cont'd

- ▶ **Frequent.** Feedback needs to occur often enough to provide direction that helps employees shape their performance.
- ▶ **Timely.** Feedback needs to occur close enough in time to performance that it has meaning
- ▶ **Linked to a Source of Help.** Feedback should not end with the employee wondering what to do next.

“I don't like being called into a meeting to look at my performance. If I am doing something wrong I want to know about it right then and there or as soon as possible so it won't continue until a review is done.”

--New York Front-line Employee

“Tell us what we are doing right or wrong. Give compliments when employees do something right.”
 -- New York Front-line Employee

Build Feedback System

1. Collect information about employee performance.
2. Share performance information with employees.
3. Record information about employee performance.
4. Help employees find ways to improve.
5. Sum it up and plan next steps.

Collect Information About Employee Performance

Major job duties	Information sources
• Show up on time	Time clock or milking log
• Follow the milking procedure	Camera and manager observation
• Treat cows gently	Manager observation, animal health and behavior
• Report problem cows	Sick pen records
• Clean teat ends	Spot check by manager during milking shift
• Work at acceptable pace	Milking log, manager observation, computerized parlor software
• Communication with manager	Manager observation
• Teamwork	Managers observation and feedback from other employees

“There is virtually no feedback - either positive or negative. So you don't know whether you're doing a good job, or a lousy job. When we do get a pat on the back, it's in a meeting of mostly all farm workers and its just a general statement. And I know that a couple workers present don't do their jobs. So I don't know where I stand. I think I do a good job, but maybe they think they do too.”
 -- New York Front-line Employee

Share Performance Information With Employees

Record Information About Employee Performance

- ▶ You need notes to have accurate data
- ▶ Makes formal evaluations much easier
- ▶ Simple notebook system
- ▶ Microsoft OneNote
- ▶ Google Docs

Help Employees Find Ways To Improve

Sum It Up And Plan Next Steps

- ▶ Use formal evaluations as opportunities to sum up all the regular feedback
- ▶ Compare performance to expectations in the major job duties
- ▶ Ask some open-ended questions:
 - What are some of the things that I do that helps you in your work?
 - Is there anything I'm doing that causes problems for you?
 - How can I help you to perform even better?
- ▶ Discuss career plans, employee development

Feedback Motivates!

“Performance reviews in the beginning were very helpful, with time it seems my accomplishments and helpfulness begins to be taken for granted...”

-- New York Senior Manager:

“I've worked at the farm for 7 years. I've only had one performance review. It was a good review overall. Any other feedback I've ever received here has been negative. Most other employees who perform the same work I do or work in the same department as me have reviews every year. I want to know how I'm doing overall, not only when what I'm doing is wrong.”

-- New York Front-line Employee

“Feedback usually only comes when I do something wrong - and it's never in person - it's always written to me on a dry-erase board.”

-- Supervisor in Ohio

Key Points

- ▶ Make your feedback effective
- ▶ Build a feedback system
- ▶ Feedback motivates

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION THAT WORKS

Richard E. Stup
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Good managers give feedback. It's not always easy and it's not always perfect, but they give it anyway. Why? Because people have little chance of improving their performance if they don't know how they're doing right now. This article is about evaluating employee performance throughout the year and giving effective feedback. Keeping feedback simple, direct, and timely will help employees to improve and make your life (the manager) a lot easier.

"The more feedback I receive the better I can do. Whether formal or informal, positive or negative it's a motivator."

The middle manager quoted here spoke clearly about the link between performance feedback and motivation. His opinion is not unusual, if you ask employees if they want or need feedback on their performance the answer is overwhelmingly yes. Throughout this article I will share quotes from real dairy farm employees who participated in research on human resource management.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Keep these six guidelines in mind, feedback should be:

1. **Specific.** Feedback should be specifically related to performance or particular incidents that can be easily understood by both the employee and supervisor. Whenever possible, feedback should include objective, measurable information.
2. **Relevant.** Feedback should focus on behaviors or attitudes that have a direct impact on performance. Issues or opinions unrelated to job performance don't belong in performance feedback.
3. **Credible.** Feedback should come from a trusted source that has a relationship with the employee and is in a position to observe performance. In other words, a milking supervisor who never visits the night milking crew cannot credibly provide them with feedback.
4. **Frequent.** Feedback needs to occur often enough to provide direction that helps employees shape their performance. Less experienced employees need feedback more frequently, but even experienced people need to hear it to feel motivated and valued. As a rule of thumb, make sure that all

of your employees get feedback from you at least once a week. Limiting feedback to formal performance reviews held once or twice a year is not enough to help employees improve.

5. Timely. Feedback needs to occur close enough in time to performance that it has meaning. For example, the parlor supervisor needs to deal with a milker who arrives late for work right away, not next month, or at the annual performance review.
6. Linked to a Source of Help. Feedback should not end with the employee wondering what to do next. Negative feedback should always conclude with a series of positive steps that the employee can take toward improvement.

In the words of one front-line employee: *“Tell us what we are doing right or wrong. Give compliments when employees do something right.”*

BUILD A FEEDBACK SYSTEM

Managers need to build and operate a feedback system throughout the year. The system ensures that employees get routine feedback on a timely basis and that managers are not overwhelmed when trying to prepare formal performance reviews. Elements of the system include these steps:

1. Collect information about employee performance.
2. Share performance information with employees.
3. Record information about employee performance.
4. Help employees find ways to improve.
5. Sum it up and plan next steps.

COLLECT INFORMATION ABOUT EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Managers need to focus feedback on major job duties. For example, it's important for a milking parlor technician to show up on time, follow the milking procedure, treat cows gently, make sure teat ends are clean, report any problem cows, and work at a good pace to get the milking shift done on schedule. There might be some other things that matter too, such as: getting along with the rest of the team, communicating with the parlor manager, or pitching in to help with other jobs when time is available. So, how can we collect information about these behaviors?

Major job duties

- Show up on time
- Follow the milking procedure
- Treat cows gently
- Report problem cows
- Clean teat ends
- Work at acceptable pace
- Communication with manager
- Teamwork

Information sources

Time clock or milking log

Camera and manager observation

Manager observation, animal health and behavior

Sick pen records

Spot check by manager during milking shift

Milking log, manager observation, computerized parlor software

Manager observation

Managers observation and feedback from other employees

Many of these key behaviors depend on the direct observation of a manager, so there's no substitute for being present to ensure that things are being done well. Take time to walk around, watch, and talk with the employees. Some farms also have some computerized sources of information that can be very helpful. Examples include: monitoring feed mixing accuracy with TMR tracking devices, using parlor information systems to tracking milker-on times, and computerized reproduction information for herdsmen. Take advantage of these data sources whenever possible.

SHARE PERFORMANCE INFORMATION WITH EMPLOYEES

Gathering information has no power unless it is fed back to employees. They can use feedback to modify their behavior: poor performance can be improved; good performance can be tweaked to become great. Without feedback, employees are left to wonder if they are doing OK. Worse yet, a poor performer might think he is doing well. One front-line employee put it this way:

"There is virtually no feedback - either positive or negative. So you don't know whether you're doing a good job, or a lousy job. When we do get a pat on the back, it's in a meeting of mostly all farm workers and it's just a general statement. And I know that a couple workers present don't do their jobs. So I don't know where I stand. I think I do a good job, but maybe they think they do too."

Performance feedback, especially the formal performance review, is often dreaded by both manager and employee. A big reason for that dread is because it requires honest and direct communication. We have to take off any masks of politeness and tell it like it really is. Some managers don't like to give positive feedback or even to say thank you, they have told me that their employees should be satisfied with the fact that they receive a paycheck. Some managers don't like to give negative feedback, they don't want the discomfort of having to deliver a tough message. The good news is that regardless of the discomfort you might have with giving feedback, practice over time makes it feel more natural.

When spending time with employees -- observing and gathering information -- give feedback to employees immediately. Often, the best feedback opportunity is to help an employee improve by intervening with a coaching approach. Most employees should hear from their supervisor at least once per week. New employees should interact with their supervisor daily. Very experienced and independent employees may go for several weeks at a time but even they will want the boss to "check in" with them from time to time.

Another great feedback opportunity is to post performance data for all to see, such as on a bulletin board, in the break room, or in a farm newsletter or website. Information such as milk production, milk quality, and pregnancy rates are great to share on a regular basis with the whole team.

RECORD INFORMATION ABOUT EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

It is not possible to accurately remember a whole year of performance information about employees. If you try to prepare an end-of-year performance review, and you have not recorded information throughout the year, good luck. You will remember the last month of performance and only a few very significant events from the other eleven months of the year. It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to write a balanced and accurate review.

Instead, take it easy on yourself, keep track of performance throughout the year. You can use a system as simple as keeping a notebook and writing down your observations, good and bad, throughout the year. Newer versions of Microsoft Office now include a program called OneNote that simulates a notebook and lets you easily capture a variety of information. A web based option is Google Docs, you can easily create a file to keep track of employee performance information.

HELP EMPLOYEES FIND WAYS TO IMPROVE

As the manager, your job is to make farm operations perform smoothly and efficiently. You can't do it all yourself so you have employees to help get the job done.

The performance of your employees is a reflection of your performance as a manager: if they perform well then you succeed, if they fail then so do you.

It is critical to link negative performance feedback with a way to improve. This may be simple, you observe an employee struggling with a task and you step in to offer feedback and coaching for improvement. Or, it might be more complex, an employee is suffering from depression that is affecting her work, you talk with her and help her to find some resources for support. It may not be clear to the employee how they can improve their work, they may lack the experience, knowledge, or creativity to find a better way. Your job is to talk with the employee and help him or her to find a way to improve or find some outside resources if necessary.

SUM IT UP AND PLAN NEXT STEPS

The formal performance review sums up performance over a longer period of time such as six months or a year. It is often linked to formal human resource actions such as salary adjustments, bonus pay, promotions, terminations, or other actions. Performance reviews should paint an accurate picture of performance, on balance, over the preceding time period. Ideally, your employees will not be surprised in a formal performance review because they have already heard the key messages through frequent day-to-day feedback from you.

Include broad components in the performance review: a summary of past performance, an open discussion on improving your work relationship with the employee, and career planning.

Performance should be easy. Go back and review the notes and information that you collected about the employee throughout the year. Rate the employee's performance in the major job duties. Prepare to discuss any critical performance incidents that happened throughout the year. Did the employee make adjustments and improve? Did they do some things particularly well that you would like to highlight?

Formal performance reviews are a great time to open up a discussion with your employee about your work relationship with them. Ask questions such as these:

- What are some of the things that I do that helps you in your work?
- Is there anything I'm doing that causes problems for you?
- How can I help you to perform even better?

You might find answers that will be very valuable to your improvement as a manager. You will also deepen and improve your working relationships with your employees.

Career planning means helping employees get where they want to go in their careers. This is one of the very best ways to help some employees with motivation.

When you express an interest and take action to further your employee's career it shows genuine interest, caring, and good intentions. For some employees, career development means preparing by gaining experience, knowledge, and education for a different position in the future. For other employees career development may have a more limited horizon and focus on excelling in the current position.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, providing feedback may be the most important job for a manager. It gives critical information to employees that will help shape performance: guiding poor performers to turn around and high performers to keep getting better. The best approach is to think of feedback as a daily opportunity to improve performance.

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