Seven steps to better supervision

As farmers become employers we address the basics of staff supervision

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1 Why employ staff?
As businesses grow and expand, it’s clear that all work can be conducted by one individual or one family as in the past. But the decision to hire staff must be accurately costed before you implement it and the business must be able to afford it through the business cycle.

2 What are the benefits?
Hiring staff allows the owner to focus more on the business planning side, which is proven to yield better per-hour returns through:
- Increased time available to research and source new technologies and farmland inputs.
- Increased planning / thinking time.
- Better work organisation.
- Time freed up to identify opportunities for the business.

3 What are the fundamentals of staff supervision?
- Work planning and scheduling.
- Leading the team through work.
- Implementing the plan surrounding the work plan.
- Control of the work through performance indicators.
- Work planning should include short-, medium-, and long-term goals; ie. daily, weekly, monthly, and year-to-year goals. Work planning should also focus on the planning of outputs and the resources needed to achieve them. November and December, not next February and March, is the time to plan spring work and how labour will be sourced for work peaks.

4 How do I motivate staff?
Leading your team through the cycle of work is crucial to success. The supervisor is responsible for letting employees know what is expected of them and inspiring and motivating employees to do good work.

5 How do I ensure things stay on track?
Implementing and monitoring the work plan is where proper supervision is most important. Rosters are essential to implement work flows and when gaps appear at critical times, there should be a backup plan.

6 How do I deal with underperformance?
Under performance of the business can be explained by many different factors in our land-based sector, not least by weather and prices, which are out of our control. Underperformance of a business is often a result from a supervisor’s inability or unwillingness to control and monitor the actions of employees.

7 How important is training?
A good supervisor will teach the employee new skills so that they can carry them out successfully. Training staff can be harder than doing the job yourself, but the payoff down the line is greater because it builds a more resilient group.

Some, maybe a lot of, business owners in the land-based sector need to be better trainers, which requires patience, not a trait that is in huge supply when one is immersed in long days and very busy work.

However, with proper planning, training can be achieved during slacker periods. Training will always be recognised by employees as beneficial and will result in bigger wins all round. Teagasc can help with training, and the Teagasc website.

Even the best working environments have issues that crop up from time to time. The important thing to remember is where you as an employer stand from a legal perspective.

The teagasc website provides a useful starting point for any queries or concerns you might have. Further information and resources can be obtained from sites such as the Workplace Relations Commission.