

Improving Performance Using Corrective Action

HUMAN RESOURCES INFORMATION SERIES FOR SUPERVISORS

- Overview
- I. Supervisor and Employee Rights
- II. Performance Problems- Origins and Options
- III. Self-Correction and Coaching
- IV. Investigation and Documentation
- V. Corrective Action
- VI. Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

Unacceptable employee performance may create frustration, reduce productivity and weaken unit morale. The first step toward improving performance is to determine why the employee is failing to meet expectations. This information guide discusses factors that often cause performance problems and describes strategies designed to correct unsatisfactory performance.

I. Supervisor and Employee Rights

Supervisor: has a right to expect successful employee performance and a right to expect the employee to correct performance that fails to meet established standards. For serious problems or continuing problems that are not addressed through coaching, the supervisor has the right to initiate appropriate corrective discipline or discharge.

Employee: has a right to be informed of the standards by which performance will be evaluated and to be given reasonable feedback and support necessary to meet those expectations. The employee also has the right to resources to prevent or correct performance problems. Eligible employees also have the right to grieve any unfair disciplinary actions.

II. Performance Problems- Origins and Options

Performance problems or poor work habits like absenteeism and tardiness may be the result of vague expectations, medical issues, personal problems or job dissatisfaction. Determining the origins of unacceptable performance is the first step toward making necessary improvement. Following are typical factors that contribute to performance problems and options and resources that may be considered.

Unclear/Unfair Expectations

Performance problems may occur when a supervisor and employee lack agreement about expectations. The supervisor should make expectations as objective and measurable as possible. For example, instead of an expectation to "complete the report in a timely manner," a more clear expectation would be to "complete the report within two business days."

Unreasonable expectations can also lead to performance problems. Competing priorities, unexpected changes, and inefficient processes can often lead to unfair expectations. The supervisor and employee should work together to identify priorities and revise schedules and procedures necessary for successful performance.

Inadequate Knowledge/Skills

Given the changing nature of work, knowledge and skills that provided successful performance in the past may no longer be adequate. Assessing required knowledge, skills and competencies, and then providing appropriate training and development may significantly improve performance.

Workplace Conflict

Conflict with a supervisor or other coworkers may result in a decline in performance. Conflict may be the result of such things as divergent work styles, disagreement about how work should be performed, or unwillingness to function as part of a team. Determining why the conflict exists is required. To do this, a frank discussion about the existing conflict and possible remedies is advised.

Job Dissatisfaction

If the employee's job dissatisfaction is related to a bad job "fit," the employee may need to consult with Human Resources.

Health Problems/Disabilities

Sometimes performance problems are due to a medical condition or disability. In some cases (such as for some mental health problems), the employee may not be aware of how the health problem is affecting his or her work. If time off from work will help, the employee may be eligible to take Family and Medical Leave, regular sick leave, or other appropriate leaves. A supervisor may also require a fitness for duty evaluation if there are questions about the employee's ability to work in a safe manner. For qualifying disabilities, the employee may request an accommodation under the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Personal or Family Issues

If a typically strong employee begins to lose focus at work, appears moody or irritable, or simply declines in performance, health or family problems may be to blame. If this is the case, referral to the Counseling Center may be in order. However, Human Resources should be consulted before any referral is made.

III. Self-Correction and Coaching

Inadequate performance or poor work habits may be the result of several factors, but regardless of why performance is unacceptable, the employee is responsible for doing what is necessary to achieve successful performance. Whether giving the supervisor feedback about unclear or unfair expectations, making training requests, attempting to resolve conflicts, or accessing needed campus support services or benefits, the employee has a key role in solving his or her performance problems. While not all the factors contributing to performance problems may be within the employee's control, the employee must take whatever steps are possible to improve his or her performance.

The supervisor also plays a key role in correcting problem performance. Most problems can be prevented or corrected by clearly communicating clear and reasonable expectations and providing feedback through the coaching process. More difficult problems may require a more intensive approach to coaching. If performance problems continue despite intensive coaching, the supervisor may need to take a more serious action.

IV. Investigation and Documentation

In order to address a continuing or serious performance problem, a supervisor or manager needs to investigate and document the situation. There are many reasons to do a thorough and fair investigation of a performance problem and to obtain relevant documentation. Sometimes problems are only based on perceptions, with no factual or documented evidence to support such perceptions. Sometimes allegations come from biased sources. When more serious actions are being considered, information should be organized for review by Human Resources. It is important to recognize that actions based on incomplete or inaccurate information may be challenged by eligible employees through the grievance procedure or with a discrimination complaint.

V. Corrective Action

The intent of the corrective action process is to ensure that the employee is aware of a problem, and potential solutions, before it becomes too serious and adversely affects the individual's status. While corrective action may start at any step, depending upon the severity of the first offense, the normal sequence is as follows:

A. **Counseling Session** - After recognizing shortcomings with an employee's work performance and/or work habits, the supervisor should discuss this situation with the employee and together, they should explore ways to correct these problems. A statement, indicating the date and subject of discussion, should be retained by the supervisor for future reference, if necessary.

B. **Corrective Notice** - If there is little or no improvement, a subsequent discussion should be held in which the problem is formally outlined in the form of a corrective notice. The supervisor should contact Human Resources to ensure the documentation is complete. This notice should specifically refer to, list the date(s) of, and summarize the previous counseling session(s), and identify the problem and specify what course of

action will follow if the performance deficiency is not corrected. The specified course of action must include reference to further disciplinary action, up to and including final notice and/or termination of employment. The employee should be asked to sign the document and should be given a copy. A third party should be present to act as witness if the employee refuses to sign the document. The original should be forwarded to Human Resources.

C. **Final Corrective Notice** - If the problem persists, the employee will be given a final written notice. The information contained in step B should be included in this final notice (summarize previous warnings, restate the problem, suggest solutions, offer your assistance). The employee must also be notified that failure to reach acceptable performance will result in termination from the University. Once again, Human Resources should be consulted before action is taken.

D. **Discharge** - If the employee has not reached and maintained an acceptable level of performance, termination will occur. As mentioned earlier, certain steps in this process may be eliminated depending on the severity of the situation. Certain acts of willful misconduct, may result in immediate dismissal. Examples include but are not limited to:

Dishonest acts, falsification of University records, physical assault, misrepresentation of illness or injury to obtain benefits, divulging confidential information, violation of the University's sexual harassment policy or other policies, possession of deadly weapons or explosives or controlled substances and insubordination.

A meeting prior to termination should be scheduled with Human Resources to review all facts and previous documentation. An exit interview for the terminated employee should be scheduled at this time.

All disciplinary notices will be disregarded following a one year period from the date of the last occurrence except where a subsequent infraction is one of the same or similar nature as the one that promoted the corrective action. **It is as important to inform an employee that performance has improved to an acceptable level as it is to inform an employee of deficiencies.** When this occurs, it will be the responsibility of the supervisor to inform the employee and document the improvement in the employee's personal file.

VI. Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *A usually outstanding employee has suddenly become moody and unproductive/ Are there any signs that would confirm that he is facing personal problems?*

A: Warning signals that an employee is experiencing personal problems may include absenteeism, inability to concentrate, confusion, inconsistent work patterns, lowered job performance, disregard for safety requirements, and poor relationships with other employees.

Q: *One of our brightest employees is refusing to participate in our new team-based structure, arguing that she is smarter than the other team members and does not want to be "pulled down" by the low standards of the other team members. Any suggestions?*

A: Making the transition to a team-based environment can be difficult for highly skilled and competitive employees. When speaking with the employee, the supervisor should recognize her concerns, acknowledge her past performance, and stress the value that she will bring to the team. The supervisor may also want to stress that the employee's involvement in a team-based process will improve the overall performance of the program or department, thereby increasing her personal status.

During the course of these conversations, the supervisor should speak candidly with the employee about her interest and willingness to remain part of the organization. If she would rather work elsewhere, proclamations about the value of team work will not be convincing. If the organizations truly moving toward being a team-based structure, involving other team members in the discussion may be appropriate.

Q: *We recently learned that one of our computer programmers is running a consulting business from his office. I suppose this explains his recent inability to complete projects. What should we do?*

A: Investigate and determine the extent of the University resources and work time used for the consulting business. It is clearly inappropriate to use University resources on work time to conduct personal business which does not benefit the University. Reimbursement for phone charges and office supplies may be required, and disciplinary action ranging from a formal reprimand to termination may be in order depending on the extent of this activity.

Q: *Our department has a great receptionist with one major fault. He is 10-20 minutes late three to four days a week. Other than that, he is well-liked by his colleagues, is wonderful with our students, and is always willing to pitch in on new projects. Unfortunately, our office starts receiving class and visitors at 8:00a.m. and he needs to be here to receive them. What options do we have?*

A: It is hard to discuss your options without knowing why the receptionist is so frequently late. Perhaps he is not "a morning person" and has trouble waking up on time. Perhaps his child's school opens too late for him to arrive on time. It is even possible that he doesn't appreciate the need to arrive by 8:00a.m.

The supervisor needs to discuss the situation with the employee and seek to determine why he is constantly tardy. Before school care, another bus route, or a flexible schedule in which another employee covers the front desk for 30 minutes each morning might be options to consider.

Q: *We caught one of our nonprobationary employees stealing whole crates of maintenance supplies. Do we really have to go through the whole progressive discipline process?*

A: Reviewing the situation with Human Resources is in order, but generally, in cases of gross misconduct-- and stealing is definitely gross misconduct -- and employee can be terminated without any previous warnings. In his case, putting the employee on leave with pay while the matter is reviewed may be appropriate.