Confront Performance Problems

Managing staff gets complicated sometimes. As a supervisor or manager, you’d like your team to work together like a well-oiled machine. But it doesn’t always happen that way.

Every employee can be expected to occasionally have a bad day. But if you begin to see continuing changes in an employee’s behavior or productivity, you may need to address a work performance problem.

Sometimes employees will take the initiative to contact their Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to address personal problems. But in some cases you will be the first to notice that something is wrong. The problems of troubled workers can impact everyone around them—resulting in a reduction in team productivity or conflicts between team members. So it’s important to act promptly.

In this issue of Your Source, we review:

• How to respond to employee performance problems by documenting them and establishing improvement plans.
• What to do if you observe negative, damaging behavior on the part of a team member.
• How you can get professional, confidential, expert advice on dealing with challenging employee issues.

It’s important to remember that you have easy access to highly skilled workplace consultants who can provide guidance when you’re dealing with employee issues.

Go online today! Log on to access Common Workplace Issues under the Library/In the Spotlight section. You can also access a wealth of information under the MANAGERS tab.

When You See a Decline in Performance

Working with an employee who has performance problems can be one of the toughest challenges a manager faces. The following tips can help you more effectively handle an uncomfortable situation.

• Address negative changes in work performance. Don’t ignore an employee’s mistakes.
• Keep your focus on the employee’s responsibilities and performance.
• Take coworkers’ complaints seriously and note them in your records.
• Learn to document performance problems in a clear, specific manner. Don’t avoid documenting unusual behavior or performance problems.
• Confront employees on inappropriate language and discuss consequences if it continues. Don’t excuse an employee’s verbally abusive language.
• Develop a written plan requiring the employee to improve his or her performance by a specific date. Make your expectations clear.
• Keep lines of communication open with Human Resources and your EAP. Don’t keep employee problems “under cover.”
• Learn to recognize the signs of drug and alcohol use, and confront them. Don’t ignore drug or alcohol use in the workplace.
• Refer employees to the EAP for help with problems impacting their work performance. Don’t attempt to counsel an employee yourself.
Managing Bad Workplace Behavior

Sometimes an employee’s behavior habits negatively affect your team’s performance. This could be through bullying, harassment, dishonesty, substance use or chronic absenteeism. You might observe colleagues having to compensate by working harder, longer, or with more “work-around” efforts.

Regardless of its origin, bad workplace behavior can reduce productivity, damage team morale and impact the organization’s bottom line. It’s important to address the behaviors promptly and professionally.

- **Document problem behavior.** If you see behavior that breaches organizational policy, such as poor attendance, start to monitor and document it. For example, keep a record of the times that the employee arrives at work.
- **Reinforce your organization’s policies.** If you observe undesirable behavior among your staff, send out a memo or email to them referring to your organization’s specific policy on the issue.
- **Supportively confront the employee.** Once you’ve documented an employee’s behaviors, set up a private meeting to discuss the issues. In a factual, non-emotional way, present evidence of the specific work performance problem, how it violates policy, and its impact on other people. State your expectations for improved employee performance.
- **Take disciplinary actions as indicated.** Follow your agency guidelines for the appropriate type of disciplinary action, e.g., performance improvement plan, written warning, suspension, etc.
- **Monitor the employee’s compliance.** If you’ve implemented an improvement plan, monitor and document the employee’s adherence according to your agency HR policies and procedures. Move to the next disciplinary action step if the problem has not been corrected.
- **Refer to the EAP.** Offer the no-cost services of the EAP (by calling 1-800-222-0364) for confidential counseling support. This can help the employee get back on track. The process of recognizing problem situations and responding with an EAP referral is a normal and expected supervisory task.

Now That’s An Idea!

**Cutting Down on Absenteeism**

- **Convey clear expectations for attendance**—Periodically review with your team the organization’s written policies on attendance, including the limit on how many absences are excusable.

- **Answer the “What’s in it for me?” question**—Remind employees that poor attendance will factor into performance reviews and, potentially, compensation.

- **Use an attendance record system**—Document the date, duration and stated reason for each case of employee absenteeism. This will help make trends in absenteeism easier to spot. It will also be good to have attendance documented in case it’s needed for reference later.

- **Offer support when appropriate**—If you learn that personal problems are affecting an employee’s attendance, offer the services of your program’s EAP. The EAP can help them deal with issues like stress, depression, substance abuse, relationships, caregiving challenges, and more. This may help improve their attendance.

Remember: Management tools and resources are available to you under the MANAGERS tab on www.FOH4YOU.com.