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EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



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**DEER OAKS EAP PRESENTS:
Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series**

*Transitioning from
Staff Member to
Supervisor*

Date: November 14, 2022

Time: 1:00-2:00 PM CT **REGISTER**

Why to Address Poor Performance

Why should I address poor performance?

Dealing with performance problems can be a real challenge for any supervisor. Experienced supervisors often say it is one of the toughest but also one of the most important parts of their jobs. It is a key supervisory responsibility, and failure to address poor performance can have a greater impact than you may appreciate. Below are some of the reasons supervisors often give for not addressing poor performance.

Dealing with poor performance can be time consuming. My time is better spent supervising my productive employees.

While dealing with poor performance can be time consuming, failing to address poor performance sends a clear message to other employees that you have different standards for poor performers, and they don't have to meet your performance expectations. With staff cutbacks, it is critical that all employees produce.

In the end, not taking the time to deal with the situation now may cost you more time in the long run. Usually, poor performance only gets worse over time—rarely does it correct itself without action on the part of the supervisor.

If I take action against one employee, it will lower the morale among other employees and create a less productive work environment.

Actually, taking such action can have just the opposite effect. Most employees want and expect to be held accountable for their work and resent it when others do not “pull their weight.” Building a productive team begins by setting clear expectations with its individual members and addressing any failure to meet those expectations with them.

Telling employees that they are not performing satisfactorily is unpleasant and requires special human-relation skills.

Very few individuals enjoy criticizing others. As a result, most employees receive little or no corrective feedback from their supervisors. Constructive consultation given early and regularly most often leads to performance improvement and eliminates the need to consider more formal action that can be even more unpleasant. Providing such consultation does not require special skills.



The procedural steps involved in addressing poor performance are complex and highly technical.

Many performance problems can be addressed prior to undertaking any formal action. Furthermore, the procedural steps are straightforward and not that complicated.

If I do take a formal performance-based action, it is likely to be appealed and ultimately overturned.

Most performance-based actions are not appealed, and when they are, the overwhelming majority of them are sustained upon appeal.

Upper management will not support me if I take action to address poor performance.

The same reasons it makes sense for you to address an employee's poor performance should also make sense to your supervisor. Share this information with your supervisor!

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), *Employee Services, Partnership & Labor Relations*. (2017, March). Introduction (B. Schuette, Ed.). In *Addressing and resolving poor performance* (Pub. No. ES/SWP-02803-03-17, pp. 2–3). Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://www.opm.go>

Communicating Expectations to Prevent Poor Performance

What can I do to prevent poor performance?

The best way for supervisors to handle poor-performance issues is to take action to avoid performance problems before they occur. Such preventive actions include the following:

- *Communicate clear performance standards and expectations to employees.* (Consider sharing your supervisor's performance expectations with your staff.) If your employees don't understand what is expected, it will be very hard, if not impossible, for them to meet those expectations. Providing clear expectations doesn't necessarily require you to lay out precisely written, detailed instructions on every performance component. Generally, the question you should ask yourself is this: "Would a reasonable person understand what was expected?"
- *Provide regular and frequent feedback on performance.* Such feedback, both positive and corrective, whether given in regularly scheduled meetings or in unscheduled discussions, is crucial to ensuring that expectations are understood. Frequent feedback lessens the likelihood that an employee will be surprised if it becomes necessary to take formal steps to resolve poor performance. Always look for opportunities to confirm that your employees understand what is expected.
- *Reward and recognize good performance, informally and formally.* Recognizing good performance is simply another way of clarifying expectations. Recognizing good performance also increases the likelihood that good performance will continue.
- *Make full use of the probationary period for new employees.* Performance problems often first show up during the initial period of employment. This period is designed to provide an opportunity for management to address such problems in an expedient manner. Furthermore, an employee who is terminated during this period is not entitled to most of the procedures and appeal rights granted to employees who have completed probationary/trial periods.

A recurring theme in successful resolution of performance problems is that taking action early is always better than waiting. This is definitely true when considering ways to prevent performance problems. Early communication,

early feedback (positive and corrective), and if appropriate, early termination during a probationary or trial period, are all good ways to prevent future performance problems. Investing time early is always time well spent.



Communicating Expectations and Performance Problems

Why consult an employee?

Most performance problems can be resolved through effective communication between supervisors and their employees. A consulting session is an opportunity to review and clarify expectations, and discuss performance problems. This step will provide advice on preparing for and conducting consulting sessions.

What's the difference between poor performance and misconduct?

It is important that you first make sure you are faced with poor performance rather than misconduct. Misconduct is generally a failure to follow a workplace rule (whether written or unwritten). Examples of misconduct include tardiness and absenteeism, insubordination, and falsification. Poor performance, on the other hand, is simply the failure of an employee to do the job at an acceptable level. The acceptable level should be documented in the employee's written performance standards and is typically described in terms of quality, quantity, or timeliness. Although it is normal for performance and misconduct to be interrelated, it is important to recognize the difference between the two.

How can I effectively consult with an employee?

Despite preventive steps taken to avoid poor performance, you may find an employee's performance is not meeting your expectations. The best approach is to meet with the employee to discuss the performance problem. The focus of this discussion should be to tell the employee exactly what must be done to bring performance up to an acceptable level, both by providing specific examples of poor performance and also by suggesting ways that performance can be improved.

It is critical that you review the employee's performance standards to ensure they clearly convey what needs to be done in the job. Your human resources staff can assist you in this review. Be sure to ask the employee if he or she understands precisely what must be done to bring performance to an acceptable level.

At times, you will need the assistance of the employee assistance program (EAP) that is available to provide counseling for physical or mental conditions, or other personal problems. It's a smart idea to know the name of the EAP specialist in your organization, and to make sure you understand the services offered through the EAP and how to refer an employee. By doing so, you are prepared to respond if employees raise personal problems that are impacting their work.

Topics Discussed During Consulting Session

- Your expectations
- The employee's performance standards
- Critical element(s) where the employee is failing
- What the employee must do to bring performance to an acceptable level

Effective Consulting Tips

- Before consulting, make sure you can clearly describe acceptable performance.
- Conduct the consulting session in a private place.
- Arrange adequate time for your comments as well as comments from the employee.
- Clearly state performance expectations, and seek confirmation that the employee understands those expectations.
- Focus on the poor performance, not on personalities or other distractions.
- Always maintain a constructive tone, along with a calm and professional demeanor.
- Seek cooperation, not confrontation.

- Remember that your goal is to improve the employee's performance, not to win an argument with the employee.
- End the session on a positive note by emphasizing that your mutual goal is improving the employee's performance.

Step One Checklist

Use the following checklist to make sure that you have completed all the actions related to step one.

1. Are you sure the issue is primarily a performance problem (as opposed to misconduct)? Yes No
2. Have you communicated performance standards to the employee? Yes No
3. Are the standards clear and reasonable? Yes No
4. Have you asked the human resources staff to review the standards for any possible problems? Yes No
5. Have you told the employee what critical elements he or she is failing? Yes No
6. Have you consulted the employee on how to improve to an acceptable level? Yes No

Let the employee know whether or not performance is improving!

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Employee Services, Partnership & Labor Relations. (2017, March). Introduction & Step one: Communicating expectations and performance problems (B. Schuette, Ed.). In Addressing and resolving poor performance (Pub. No. ES/SWP-02803-03-17, pp. 4–7). Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://www.opm.gov>

Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

Q. News reports have frequently mentioned “The Great Resignation” over the past year, referring to how many employees quit their jobs and why. What can supervisors or managers do to help curb the loss of good workers?

A. Research studies showed that when the crisis subsided enough for employees to return to work, millions had moved on. What followed was a worker shortage allowed employees to compete for greater benefits, including attractive remote jobs. A desire to not return to the original job also played a role in adding to a labor shortage. Suddenly, “employers needed employees more than employees needed employers.” One study concludes that factors that can exacerbate the loss of workers are “toxic” company culture, low salary, poor management, lack of healthy work-life boundaries, and not allowing remote work. Are you able to influence change with any of these issues? Some are not related to pay but soft skills and relationship management. It is here that the EAP has expertise. Read below what the Gallup research organization discovered about the supervisor’s role. Strive for a positive and engaging relationship with workers. Most will think twice before giving it up, even for additional pay in another job. Source: www.gallup.com/workplace/358346/gallup-workplace-insights-learned-2021.aspx.

Q. There is debate about which employees are more stressed, those on-site or those who work remotely. What does the research say?

A. The Gallup organization examined employee stress during the pandemic. They discovered that remote workers generally experience more stress than on-site workers. Although there are clear benefits to working from home, like avoiding the need to commute, remote workers often manage their personal lives and domestic issues in tandem with expectations by employers to deliver high levels of work performance, both in quality and quantity.

The research found that remote workers may be more engaged, meaning they appear to demonstrate more enthusiasm, eagerness to perform, and desire to do a good job. This increased engagement may help others support their position and see its positive benefits. Supervisors should be watchful for signs of stress in remote workers who may tend to minimize or mask them, thereby risking burnout.

Q. What is the #1 way to motivate an employee?

A. Thousands of resources have been authored on motivating employees, but the one thing that appears to dominate most lists is “personally thanking employees for good performance.” Sound simple? It is for some, but not all. A critical part of the strategy is communicating gratitude with sincerity. Humans easily detect non-sincerity, so one must get this part right. Start by examining your own personal reaction to something the employee has done well. Feel the gratitude. Appreciate its impact. Visualize the benefits. Then use this energy and awareness to communicate appreciation. Praise put in writing will “10X” your positive impact on the employee. Some managers offer praise naturally. It’s a critical soft skill for supervisors to know, but it will feel awkward without sincerity accompanying it. Can the EAP help you be a more genuine and authentic praise giver? Yes.

Information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Some of it might not apply to your particular company policies and available programs. This information is proprietary and intended only for eligible EAP members. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.

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