

Managing Underperformance

Poor performers are a danger not only to themselves but to their colleagues and the organisation as a whole. When times are good poor performers can generally 'get away with it'. Now that the economic downturn is in full throttle, however, forgiveness is becoming less palatable.

Managing performance requires us to reconcile **caring for and developing our people** with **ensuring that departmental and organisational aims are achieved**. Managing performance requires us to strike a balance between compassion and accountability.

A check list for managing performance

1. Are the performance standards set and documented?
2. Are the standards and expectations understood properly?
3. Are the standards agreed with the individual?
4. Are the agreed standards being met?
5. What is the reason the agreed standards are not being met?

It is the line manager's responsibility to sit down with the person and ask them what's happening that's making it difficult for them to meet the standards.

The duty of the line manager is to identify what the problem is, whether the person wants to resolve it, and to facilitate help or a solution. It is a vital role of the line manager to manage performance that is below 'contracted' standard, to identify the actual root cause, to be able to take appropriate action, firmly, professionally, creatively and compassionately.

THE WHAT AND HOW OF MANAGING UNDERPERFORMANCE

	What to do	How to do it
Get his/her views on their performance against objectives or role profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hear employees list of objectives - get his/her views on performance - avoid arguing at this stage 	<p>let him/her speak first</p> <p>ask open questions clarify if necessary</p> <p>tell him/her you don't wish to comment yet</p>

	What to do	How to do it
Give your views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give your views on performance against objectives/job profile 	<p>be specific</p> <p>be prepared to offer examples</p> <p>refer to previous discussions you have had during the year</p>
Explore areas of agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for each objective/job responsibility, discuss areas you agree on - achievements/successes - unsatisfactory performance 	<p>recognise these and give praise</p> <p>discuss reasons</p> <p>ask "why do you think this has happened"</p> <p>encourage them to do the thinking</p>
Explore areas of disagreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - agree differences of opinion on specific objectives/dimensions - try to establish the reasons for the difference - raise issues you are concerned about - discuss "other factors" and their impact on results - don't try to "impose" your views at this stage 	<p>be specific on where you differ</p> <p>review the "facts" together</p> <p>give examples to illustrate your points</p> <p>explore the factors which may have affected results</p> <p>offer to point out examples in the future</p> <p>propose to get input from others</p>
Agree strengths and improvement areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ask for views on specific strengths and development needs - strike a balance 	<p>refer to previous discussions for examples</p> <p>ask "what skills, abilities etc helped you to achieve your objectives?"</p> <p>look for strengths and weaknesses</p>
Agree action to improve performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - agree action to be taken by both of you 	<p>ask for employee's ideas on action he/she could take</p> <p>ask what you could do to help him/her</p>

The capability process - points for consideration:

- Identify exactly what standards the employee should be achieving
- Identifying the poor performance
- Ensure the employee is aware of the required standards and the areas of poor performance
- Identify the reasons for poor performance
- Provide any necessary support during a review period of the employee's performance
- Meet regularly to consider if the poor performance is continuing
- If the poor performance is continuing, the disciplinary process needs to be followed.

Source: Mills & Reeve solicitors

Top tips on Handling defensive Responses

- Recognise that the individual is behaving defensively
- Do not get “hooked” and take attacks personally
- Stay calm/rational
- Listen carefully and Reflect back what he/she has said
- Show empathy
- If criticised acknowledge that there may be some truth in what the individual has said
- Ask for clarification e.g. “What is it about my behaviour that makes you say that?”
- Look for areas of agreement
- Seek a solution

Questions for Consideration

Are the expectations clear?

What is stopping me from managing the underperformance?

What are the benefits of managing underperformance?

What signals does managing underperformance give out to the rest of the team?

What support could I get to enable me to manage underperformance in a professional manner?