



EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

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MANAGING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Your most important job as a manager or supervisor is to manage the performance of the people who report to you. To do this, you need to:

- Translate the goals of the organization into priorities and goals for each member of your team
- Ensure that your team members understand their individual goals and the performance expected of them
- Ensure that your team members have the skills and tools needed to do the work that is expected of them
- Monitor your team members' performance by observing the results of their work and their contributions to the work of the team
- Give regular feedback on each team member's performance—positive when goals are met, and constructive when performance falls short

When a team member is not meeting expectations, you need to:

- Explain the gap between the desired result and what the employee has delivered
- Identify what needs to change, and the timeline for the employee to make that change
- Provide ongoing coaching, and arrange for additional training as needed
- If appropriate, offer information about help available for personal issues through the employee support program

Performance management requires regular, clear communication with your employees, and it sometimes requires that you have direct conversations that can be uncomfortable.

If you find that you are reluctant to face an employee's performance issue and are putting off having the needed conversations, consider tapping into the resources available to bridge this gap. Not being honest and direct is unfair to the employee who needs the feedback, as well as to other team members who rely on their colleague's performance. This may result in a collective decline in job satisfaction. A specialist at the employee support program can help you get past your reluctance and plan for the conversation.



When you notice and address performance issues quickly, you give the employee a chance to get back on track before problems become habits. You also help the employee recognize how issues outside of work may be affecting work performance.

Employees are often relieved to have an open and honest discussion about work problems, as it gives them a chance to work with you or others to find solutions. When you ignore performance problems or let them continue for too long, they can affect the morale of the entire team. By managing performance well, you show that you care about all of your employees, and that you are committed to helping your team succeed.

When a new employee does not meet expectations, you may need to explain your expectations more clearly or provide more training. When an experienced employee has a lapse in performance, that's a sign that something has changed. Performance lapses can have a wide range of causes, including stress and burnout, personal or family issues, and conflict or tension with coworkers.

Delivering Difficult Performance Feedback

Prepare for the conversation.

- Be clear on the end goal for the conversation.
- Document specific, recent examples of the performance problem in neutral, objective terms that you would feel comfortable having the employee or anyone else read.
- Organize the points you plan to cover, focusing on work behavior.
- Find out what support options are available to the employee.
- Consult with your HR representative in planning the conversation.
- Review your plan for the conversation with a specialist at the employee support program.
- Plan to have the conversation in a private, comfortable space.
- Consider how the employee will respond.

In the Conversation.

- Deliver your feedback messages clearly and directly, citing specific examples, without emotion and without criticizing the employee as a person.
- Offer support options, including referral to the employee support program, if appropriate.
- Make next steps clear, including an action plan, your expectations for improved performance, and scheduled check-in meetings.

Follow up.

- Monitor ongoing performance for adherence to the agreed action plan.
- Be consistent in providing ongoing feedback.
- Make yourself available for regularly scheduled check-in meetings.

Possible Causes of Employee Performance Problems

What you notice as a decline in work performance is often the visible indicator of deeper feelings that are driving an employee's performance down, much the way the visible part of an iceberg is just a small portion of the whole. A deeper and broader obstacle lies below the surface. There can be many causes of performance problems.

In a new employee or when a job changes, performance problems may be due to:

- Unclear job expectations
- Insufficient training
- Inefficient or inadequate tools
- Inadequate skills, or a mismatch of skills and abilities to the job



In an employee who has previously met expectations, performance issues may be caused by:

- Health concerns
- Transportation problems
- Disruption in or unreliable child care arrangements
- Responsibility for care of an ill or aging family member
- Relationship problems outside of work
- Financial issues, such as excess credit card debt
- Legal issues, such as divorce or bankruptcy
- Conflict with colleagues at work
- Stress or burnout from overload at work
- Mental health issues, including anxiety or depression
- Substance-use problems

Signs that work stress or issues outside of work are affecting an employee's performance may include declines in:

- Accuracy of work
- Timeliness of work output
- Ability to focus on work
- Attitude towards work or coworkers
- Contribution to teamwork
- Physical stamina
- Problem-solving skills
- Attendance

Note that work performance includes the effect an employee has on the work and morale of coworkers and the performance of the team. An employee who is delivering satisfactory work results may still be causing performance problems if emotional outbursts, negative comments, or an unwillingness to cooperate with others are affecting the performance of the team.

Your job as a manager is to see that performance expectations are met and work results are achieved. It isn't to solve your employee's personal problems. But when personal issues are affecting work performance, you do have a role to play. You need to let the employee know that you have observed a lapse in work performance and that you want to help them get back on track. One way to help may be to suggest that the employee seek help from the employee support program, and to provide information on how to access the program.

Source: Morgan, H. (2020). Managing performance (pp. 6-9). In A manager's guide to the employee support program (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

For Managers: Recognizing & Dealing with an Alcohol- or Substance-Use Problem at Work

As a manager, you are in a unique position to notice an employee's alcohol- or substance-use problem and to take action to refer the employee to help, following your organization's policies. You are responsible for maintaining a safe, healthy, and productive workplace, and for being fair and consistent in managing employee performance.

Know your organization's policies.

Familiarize yourself with your organization's policies around alcohol and substance use, and make sure that these are clearly communicated to employees.

Some organizations, and some jobs, have extremely strict standards when it comes to alcohol or substance use among employees, often for safety reasons. These standards and rules may be balanced with programs to help employees recover from a substance-use problem and return to productive work. (Note that substance use includes the misuse of prescription pain medications, some of which contain opioids and are addictive.)



Know the warning signs of alcohol and substance use. As you monitor employee performance, be alert to changes such as:

- Attendance problems
- Errors and inconsistent work quality
- Reduced ability to focus on work
- Mood swings
- Withdrawal from colleagues
- Sleepiness or fatigue
- Less care of personal appearance

Have a conversation with the employee about any performance issues.

The signs above are indications of a personal problem, not necessarily of alcohol or substance use. That might be depression, exhaustion from family caregiving responsibilities, a medical condition, or stress from another cause.

When you notice any of these problems, they should prompt you to have a conversation with the employee about work performance after documenting specific examples of work lapses. It's appropriate to ask about any challenges or changes outside of work that may be causing the performance problems (recognizing that the employee does not need to share that information). If the issue is with substance use, be prepared to meet with defensive responses rather than an open admission of a problem.

Whether the performance problems are caused by alcohol or substance use or another personal problem, your role is to remind the employee of your expectations for the job, clearly describe the gap between those expectations and the observed performance, and suggest that the employee seek help from your employee support program.

Your human resources (HR) representative or a specialist at your employee support program can help you plan for this performance conversation and coach you on how to word your suggestion that the employee seek help.

If you have noticed more specific indications of alcohol or substance use, such as slurred speech, unsteady walk, dilated pupils, bloodshot eyes, or hyperactivity, it's appropriate to mention your observations as part of the performance-management conversation, but not in an accusatory way. These signs, too, could have other explanations, such as allergies or the effects of medication for a health condition. Keep the focus of your conversation on observed work performance, with specific examples.

Follow your employer's policies around testing and referrals for support and treatment.

If your organization or work unit is required to follow drug-testing protocols, a substance-use problem may be detected as part of routine testing. When that happens, a qualified substance use professional (SAP) may need to do an assessment of the employee, and the employee may be barred from working until the SAP confirms that the problem is resolved. If you have any questions about these requirements or your role in the process, contact your HR representative.

Whether the employee seeks help voluntarily for an alcohol- or substance-use problem or is required to get help by your organization's rules, you should continue to be supportive and encourage the employee to resolve the problem so that they can resume productive work. Note that being supportive is not the same as being an enabler. An enabler ignores, helps to hide, or minimizes the significance of an alcohol- or substance-use problem in misguided efforts to be kind or avoid conflict. Be encouraging while holding the employee accountable. Continue to monitor the employee's performance, giving positive feedback when deserved and pointing out performance lapses as needed. A specialist at your employee support program may be able to offer guidance on appropriate ways to express your support and share performance feedback in ways that help the employee move forward.



If an employee denies having a problem and refuses to seek help, but continues to show poor performance, you will need to deal with it as you would any performance problem. Follow your organization's performance-management protocols.

Continue to encourage the employee and manage performance.

When an employee has dealt with an alcohol- or substance-use problem and returned to productive work, be aware that the recovery process can be gradual and may involve relapses. Continue to monitor and provide feedback on performance, as you would with any employee, and be prepared to repeat the process of referral for alcohol- or substance-use counseling.

This was adapted from A Manager's Guide to the Employee Support Program.

Source: Morgan, H. (2021, December 9). For managers: Recognizing and dealing with an alcohol- or substance-use problem at work (Z. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

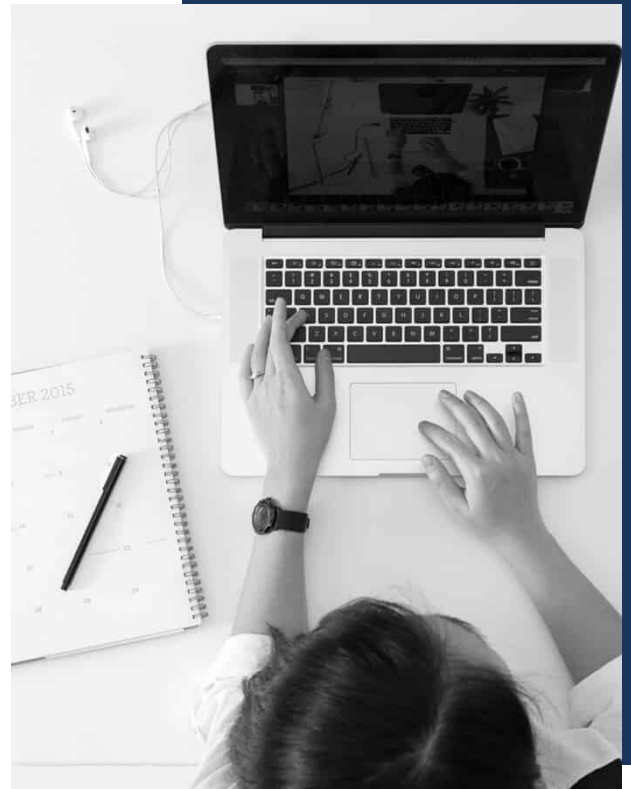
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. I am certain my employee can succeed, but he lacks confidence. What can I do as a supervisor to help him become more confident? The EAP would be completely unfamiliar with his job, so is a referral still appropriate if his uncertainty about how to perform his essential functions remains?

A. Although your employee's confidence can be undermined by many factors, some of which you may be unable to identify or manage, there are a few steps you can take to help him acquire a better attitude and the performance to match. Be sure you have provided clear expectations about the job and the outcomes you expect. This is a key issue seen by EAPs when employees are referred for underperformance. Offer feedback on achievements because positive reinforcement increases confidence. Help the employee identify small, achievable goals. Confidence grows with each success. Also, consider training, independent problem-solving, and mentoring. One powerful confidence builder often overlooked by supervisors is recognizing the effort employees expend in attempting to achieve goals. So, even when immediate successes are not visible, effort expended will reinforce confidence for another try. Let your employee know that building confidence is a process, a journey of sorts, and results are not instantaneous. Regarding the EAP, make a referral if confidence-building tips don't work, but speak with the EAP first to share a fuller picture of the employee's issues.

Q. I referred two employees to the EAP because they experience frequent conflicts. I have not threatened disciplinary action and instead have asked that they be adults and resolve their issues, but it is not working. Am I doing anything wrong with this situation?

A. Asking employees to resolve differences can be difficult because neither party will initiate taking a constructive path to end the conflict. It takes a third party to help harmonize the workers. The EAP is a good choice for this help. Start with a private conversation with each employee separately. Listen actively to their perspectives. Empathize, and don't judge either worker at this stage. Clearly communicate your expectations for professional behavior, respect, and mutual cooperation. Prior to a formal referral, discuss your impressions with the EAP and refer the employees. Each should sign a release. Schedule regular follow-up meetings with the



employees to monitor their progress. Address any new issues immediately if they arise. Keep a record of the conflict and your efforts to resolve it. Let employees know you are doing so. This sends a message that the manager is serious about ending the conflict one way or another, and in turn, this motivates the employees to seek resolution and stay motivated to remain cooperative.

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