Building Workplace Performance

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A Resource Guide
Managers

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Introduction

A manager's work is filled with constant challenges. And, it's a tough job made even tougher when employee performance problems or conflicts occur.

Optum Behavioral Solutions can help. This resource guide for managers is filled with practical tips and strategies for managing performance issues and maintaining a positive, productive work environment. It also shows you how the resources available from Optum can help you achieve these goals.

Keep in mind that the information and recommendations in this guide should not supersede your organization's standard policies and procedures. And, this book doesn't cover every possible workplace situation. If you need further information or assistance, you can call Optum any time to request a development training program or schedule a management consultation with a management consultant.

Management Consultations

As part of your Optum benefit, you have access to an unlimited number of telephonic management consultations with one of our management consultants. These licensed clinicians and Certified Employee Assistance Professionals have extensive experience consulting with managers and supervisors on workplace issues. They can give you advice and proven suggestions for:

- Identifying and managing troubled employees
- Learning to provide clear, constructive and timely feedback
- Making informal and formal referrals to Optum, especially for counseling services
- Dealing with non-work issues that impact the workplace
- And many other management questions you may have

Just call Optum to request a management consultation. Management consultants are available during regular business hours.

Management and Organizational Development Training Programs

You have access to training programs designed to enhance management and supervisory skills. They also can help you address workplace issues and concerns. These interactive workshops and seminars are conducted by experienced training and consulting professionals. They can be tailored to meet the specific needs of your organization.

Topics include:

- Promoting teamwork
- Managing conflict
- Effective coaching and counseling
- Building a safe place to work
- Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace
- And more

For more information or to arrange a training program, call the Optum Workplace Effectiveness staff toll-free at 1-866-876-2785.

Helping managers deal with employee issues and boost productivity is just one more way Optum helps you live and work well.

Section 1: Managing Performance Problems

To sustain peak performance in your department, it's important to recognize and address problems that can impair productivity. In this section, you'll find practical information and techniques for doing just that.

Minimizing Distractions

Life in today's 24/7 world can be quite a scramble. Employees juggle both work and personal responsibilities. It's very easy for a personal issue to distract someone on the job. As a manager, you can help minimize these distractions by being aware of employee concerns. And, make employees aware of resources that can assist them with their concerns before they lead to major performance problems.

Your organization's benefits package may do the legwork for you. Ask your Human Resources representative if there are any work/life benefits — such as childcare referral services or other programs — that can help employees meet their personal responsibilities so they can concentrate on work.

Suggesting Optum for Help (Informal Referral)

If an employee confides in you about a personal concern or simply mentions it in passing, you can suggest he or she call Optum. The Optum program is a free, confidential and professional resource. It helps people resolve personal problems so they can concentrate on work. Remember to make any recommendation in a private, supportive manner. Provide information about the Optum program to the employee. Your Human Resources representative will have the information. Remind the employee that, while you're encouraging use of the program, calling Optum is up to him or her.

Of course, you don't have to wait for an employee problem to present itself. Make sure your staff understands the Optum program and knows how to use the services on their own. If you're enthusiastic about the Optum program, odds are your employees will use this valuable resource when they need assistance with life's challenges.

Being Alert to Performance Problems

Dealing with performance problems can be one of a manager's biggest challenges. While it's tempting to wait and hope that the problem will go away by itself, this rarely happens. If you observe a decline in performance — whether it takes the form of poor quality work, excessive absenteeism or conflicts with co-workers — you need to address it immediately and directly.

Warning Signs of a Potential Problem

Everyone has a bad day from time to time. And, a few bad days don't necessarily signal a performance problem. However, certain behaviors may suggest that an emotional, substance abuse or other type of concern is impacting the workplace. It's important to remember that you shouldn't diagnose a possible problem. Instead, be aware of these warning signs to help you recognize when a performance problem is developing. That way, you can address it immediately.

Managing Performance Problems

Attendance
- Takes frequent unexpected or unexcused absences
- Complains of vague illnesses
- Often leaves work early or returns late from lunch
- Takes long, extended breaks
- Has numerous Monday and/or Friday absences
- Regularly disappears from the work area without explanation

Concentration
- Tends to forget instructions
- Has difficulty handling complex assignments
- Takes longer with tasks, or doesn't put enough effort into the job
- Neglects detail

Communication
- Is argumentative
- Is less communicative than in the past
- Writes unclear communications

Interpersonal Skills
- Avoids co-workers or manager/supervisor
- Complains excessively
- Responds to input and/or feedback in a defensive or angry manner
- Creates friction with co-workers or manager

Dependability
- Fails to meet schedules and/or deadlines
- Makes unreliable and/or untrue statements

Initiative
- Needs constant supervision
- Has a hard time accepting and/or following through on new projects

Quality of Work
- Causes complaints from customers
- Demonstrates inconsistent and/or sporadic work quality
- Is careless or makes more and more mistakes

Judgment
- Makes inconsistent or poor decisions
- Draws an increased number of poor conclusions
- Produces frequent errors on routine matters

Safety
- Experiences more on-the-job accidents
- Ignores proper safety procedures
- Disregards the safety of others

Other Behavior Issues
- Has inappropriate personal appearance or grooming
- Shows less interest and/or enthusiasm for job
- Experiences wide swings in mood or attitude
- Generates complaints or concerns from co-workers

Documenting Performance

Managing performance problems is never easy. Good documentation can make a tough situation a little less stressful by giving you a factual record that lets you remain objective. It also helps you explain how the employee needs to improve. And, it protects you and your organization in case you have to terminate an employee.

By keeping a formal record of your concerns, you will be able to:

- Identify and describe key problems.
- Separate the facts from any personal reactions you may have about the situation — such as frustration or irritation — so you can stay focused on job performance.
- Decide when to address your concerns with the employee.
- Help the employee recognize the problem and its severity by presenting the work performance decline in a factual, nonjudgmental manner.

While documentation takes time and can seem daunting, the process doesn't have to be complicated. You can use the following documentation guidelines in conjunction with any specific procedures your organization may have in place. Be sure to check with your Human Resources representative and follow your organization's policies.

- Document problem areas. It can be helpful in discussions to include examples of good work as well.
- Record actual observations, not opinions.
- Be specific, fair and consistent.
- Focus on performance and conduct, not on personal issues.
- List information that shows a pattern over time.

Managing Performance Problems

Here's an example:

Job Performance Record			Employee Name: John Smith
Day	**Date**	**Time**	**Change in Performance**
Monday	3/11	2:30 p.m.	Missed report deadline. I left him a message at 9 a.m. asking for status. Did not return message until 2 p.m. Said he was at the dentist. Swears he told me about the appointment a week ago.
Wednesday	3/13	9:45 a.m.	Received John's report. It's good! But still late. Gave him positive feedback on the article and emphasized how critical it is for him to finish his work on time — or to let me know well in advance if there's a problem.
Friday	3/15	9:30 a.m.	Called in sick. Said he had a migraine.
Tuesday	3/26	9:05 a.m.	Received complaint from field staff about missing shipments. Spoke to John, who was very defensive and blamed the distributor for problems he has "solved" in the past.
Thursday	3/28	9:40 a.m.	Tardy. 40 minutes late without a call.
Friday	3/29	9:25 a.m.	Left a message with the front desk saying his car broke down and he wouldn't be able to get to work.
Monday	4/01	11:00 a.m.	Absent. No explanation.
Tuesday	4/02	3:30 p.m.	Had one-on-one meeting with John. Told him I'm concerned about how often he's been out lately. He promised to have all his work complete by the end of the week.

As this example shows, it's important to update your record on an ongoing basis, noting each incident while it's fresh in your mind. You may want to keep a separate notebook just for this purpose, so you don't end up with multiple scraps of paper that are easy to misplace. Most importantly, keep your documentation in a confidential place.

While documenting an employee's performance, you should continue to work with the employee to help him or her improve. Give the person ongoing feedback. Be specific about what behavior or action needs to change. Identify opportunities to help the employee learn to do the job properly — such as additional training or outsourced educational seminars.

Ideally, you will be able to resolve the situation informally. If not, your documentation will serve as a valuable reinforcement when you have a formal meeting with the employee to discuss concerns and expectations. It also will provide solid support if you have to let the employee go.

Documentation Tips
- Record each incident while it's still fresh in your mind.
- Note the date, time and location for each incident.
- Describe the action you took and the employee's reaction. Also, write down the subsequent impact on the employee's work performance and/or the work group.
- Specify all people or work groups involved.
- List specific performance standards or regulations violated.
- Stay objective. Record observations, not impressions, feelings or judgments.

Holding a Formal Performance Meeting
What do you do when an employee is not measuring up to job expectations? How do you discuss the situation with the employee? What can you do to minimize the impact of one employee's performance decline on the rest of the department?

All situations and workplace environments are unique. However, the following formal meeting technique can work in a variety of situations — both simple and complex. This six-step process can make a difficult situation less stressful. It helps you prepare for and conduct a formal performance meeting in an organized, objective manner.

Typically, a formal performance meeting happens after there has been a continuing, well-documented pattern of decline. In many cases, however, it makes sense to meet with employees as soon as you notice a problem developing. Communicating your concerns and outlining expectations early often helps an employee get back on track right away.

Step 1: Be Prepared

Preparation is the key to a successful formal performance meeting. Here's what you should do before you sit down with the employee:

1. Schedule the meeting. Select a time and place that will ensure the meeting is private.
2. Organize and review your documentation. You may want to make notes on the key points you want to cover. Having an outline makes it easier to remain calm and objective. Prepare the messages you want to communicate to the employee, making sure the language and tone are appropriate.
3. Prepare a list of performance expectations so you can tell the employee exactly what he or she needs to do. You can create your list by referring to the formal job description and comparing the individual's current and past performance. Be sure to include both acceptable and unacceptable levels of performance.
4. Consult with your Human Resources representative to make sure your messages are appropriate and that any planned action is consistent with your organization's guidelines. You also can call Optum for advice from a management consultant.
5. Ask your Human Resources representative for a copy of your organization's Optum benefit information.

Once you're thoroughly prepared, you are ready to meet with the employee.

Step 2: Start Positively

Begin the meeting by expressing concern for the employee. You may want to mention one or all of the following:

- You scheduled this meeting because you've noticed a change in work performance.
- The change is not typical of past work habits.
- You're concerned about the change and the impact it's having on others in the workplace.

Next, mention a couple of examples that show you recognize the good work the employee has done in the past and/or recently. At this point, you can:

- Let the person know of his or her value to the organization.
- Cite the employee's specific contributions — years of service, past performance, technical skills, etc.
- Emphasize your appreciation for these contributions.

Step 3: Zero In on the Problem

After you've reinforced the positive aspects of the employee's performance, it's time to explain why you're concerned about his or her current work. The notes and expectations list you made when preparing for the meeting will be very useful as you cover the following points:

1. **Explain expectations**
   - Review specific job expectations.
   - Be concise and detailed.

2. **Specify performance concerns**
   - Review where performance has slipped compared to past work behavior.
   - Give objective examples with dates and times. You can show the employee your documentation if you're met with resistance or denial.
   - Emphasize the seriousness of the situation.

Remind yourself to focus on the facts of the job performance and not the personality of the individual, regardless of the employee's response during this part of the conversation. Avoid making judgments or becoming angry or defensive.

Watch Your Body Language

It's important to keep a natural and relaxed body language during the formal meeting. The conversation can be even more difficult if you appear nervous. Demonstrate assertiveness by using direct eye contact, an erect body posture and clear speech. Gestures and facial expressions can add emphasis, provided that they are authentic and natural for you.

Step 4: Plan a Solution

Allow the employee to respond to your concerns. Ask if there's anything going on with the job that is making it difficult for the person to meet expectations. Find out if there's anything you can do — such as providing additional training — to help the employee be successful.

Discuss an improvement plan for the employee. The plan should include:

- The specific performance issues and/or behaviors that need to be addressed
- Detailed actions to correct the performance problem — such as counseling, on-the-job coaching or off-site seminars
- An appropriate timeline for the completion of each action. Include dates and times for intermediate and summary reviews of the employee's performance.

Step 5: Refer the Optum Program

If the employee mentions a personal problem that's impacting work performance, recommend the Optum program in your formal performance meeting. Here's how to make a "formal referral" to the employee:

1. **Provide information about the Optum program.**
   • Mention that the Optum program provides prepaid assistance for any personal problem or concern the employee may have.
   • Assure the person that use of the program is completely confidential — no one will know what services are used or what is discussed.
   • Give the employee information on the Optum program. Include full details on how to use the benefits. Again, your Human Resources representative can provide this for you.

2. **Suggest that the employee call Optum.**
   • Offer assistance in making the call if necessary (i.e., offer the private use of your phone and office to call Optum after the meeting).
   • Tell the employee that using the Optum program is his or her decision. Remind the employee that regardless of whether he or she decides to call Optum, you still expect performance to improve.

The Release of Information Form

If you would like to confirm that the employee has used the Optum program, ask him or her to sign a Release of Information form. It can be supplied by the management consultant. Be sure to explain to the employee that the Release of Information form only allows Optum to provide confirmation that he or she used the services and/or any counseling appointments — and nothing more. Assure the employee that Optum will maintain his or her privacy and will not disclose the specific nature of the problem or what services were used.

Remind the employee that he or she can still call Optum even if he or she chooses not to sign the form.

Please fax all signed Release of Information forms to Optum at the number provided by your management consultant.

Keep in mind that the Optum program is voluntary and use of the services is up to the employee. A formal referral is not a disciplinary measure. It doesn't supersede your organization's standard policies and procedures for dealing with poor work performance. Please check with your Human Resources representative before your formal performance meeting in case you need to make a referral to Optum.

Making It Mandatory

Some companies may require an employee to seek help through Optum in order to retain his or her employment. This is called a mandatory referral. Check with your Human Resources representative to see if your organization uses mandatory referrals for corrective action.

If so, and if a mandatory referral is necessary, call Optum and speak with a management consultant. The specialist will help you prepare for the referral process, as well as:

- Find a suitable provider and make an appointment for the employee's initial evaluation.
- Supply a Release of Information form for the employee to sign so the management consultant can communicate with you about the employee's compliance with treatment.
- Provide a confidential report to you or the Human Resources representative regarding the employee's cooperation and attendance. The specialist also will include any recommended treatment or educational programs for the employee.
- Make referrals to appropriate resources to help the employee.
- Update you on the employee's progress with the treatment or educational programs.
- Notify you when the program is completed and if any work accommodations and/or conditions are needed for the employee to return to work.
- Continue regular follow-ups with you until the matter is resolved.

Special Note for Regulated Businesses
If your organization is subject to regulations of the Department of Transportation, Nuclear Regulatory Commission or Department of Energy, the management consultant has the knowledge and expertise to help you navigate the regulatory protocols in case an employee tests positive for drug use.

Step 6: Discuss Next Steps and Consequences
- Tell the employee that you will summarize the improvement plan in writing for him or her to sign. Schedule a date and time for a follow-up meeting to discuss and sign the written plan.
- Outline what disciplinary action you will have to take if work expectations aren't met. Be specific without being threatening. Be prepared to follow through with the action if performance does not improve.
- Emphasize that the employee is responsible for resolving the present situation and avoiding future consequences.

Step 7: Wrap It Up with a Vote of Confidence

Remind the employee that you have confidence in his or her ability to address these issues, and that you're interested in making sure that he or she succeeds.

After the meeting, document your discussion with the employee. Include details of the improvement plan and the employee's willingness or refusal to use the Optum program.

Step 8: Follow Up

Following up after the formal meeting is the best way to ensure that the situation is resolved in a positive, productive manner. Here are a few suggestions:

- Continue to monitor the employee's work performance, documenting any improvement and decline.
- Set up regular times to give feedback and review progress as per the improvement plan.
- Don't be overly sensitive or concerned about how the employee feels about the situation.
- Support and recognize positive behavior changes.
- Follow through with disciplinary procedures if necessary.
- Keep all aspects of the situation private. Never share your concerns or frustrations with the employee's co-workers.

The formal meeting can be a welcome catalyst that motivates a struggling employee to resolve problems and improve performance. However, it's possible that some people, when presented with a factual review of the issues and clear expectations of what must be done, may decide to move on to another job. And, then there are those who listen to what you have to say, but just cannot or choose not to meet expectations.

In any case, the formal meeting will help you better understand your employee's potential. And, you'll get a sense of his or her interest in and commitment to improving performance. It also provides an important document should you need to take disciplinary action in the future.

Remember, you don't have to handle tough performance problems on your own. If you need assistance, check with your Human Resources representative, and call Optum to speak with a management consultant.

When a Crisis Hits

Sometimes an employee's behavior can reach a point where it threatens the safety and well-being of the employee or his or her co-workers. If you believe the employee is in immediate danger of harming himself or herself, or other employees, immediate action is required. Follow your organization's procedures for responding to dangerous situations, which may include notifying security or calling the police. Once everything is under control, you can contact Optum for additional support and guidance. Depending on the situation, you also may seek assistance in coordinating a Fitness-for-Duty evaluation.

A Fitness-for-Duty evaluation requires the employee to see a designated psychologist or psychiatrist before returning to work. This professional assesses the employee for any impairment due to a mental health issue, substance abuse or both. The management consultant will find a suitable provider to conduct the evaluation. And, he or she will work with you to address any additional concerns or service needs.

Keep in mind that, while the management consultant helps coordinate the Fitness-for-Duty evaluation, the costs of the evaluation aren't covered by Optum.

Terminating Employees

If an employee continues to fail to meet job requirements, you may have to terminate him or her. Terminating an employee is never easy. In order to handle the process as smoothly as possible, always consult your Human Resources representative. And, you can always call Optum and talk to a management consultant for additional advice and support.

Managing Performance Problems

Notes

Maintaining a Positive Workplace

There are many ways to cultivate a positive and successful work environment — including motivating staff, fostering collaboration, recognizing contributions and dealing with personality issues. In this section, you'll find a collection of practical tips and techniques for:

Creating a Motivating Environment

No matter the business, it's a fact that motivated employees are more productive than their ambivalent counterparts. People who want to do something — and want to do it well — will do a better job than those whose main interest is simply "getting it done."

That's why effective managers have a little bit of cheerleader in them to build spirit, pride and attachment to the organization. Enthusiasm, energy and excitement are the qualities that inspire confidence and make people feel their work is meaningful.

Traditional management teachings suggest that the job of management is primarily one of control. But, today's best leaders know that the more they control others, the less likely it is that people will excel. So, they don't command and control. Instead, they support and motivate by providing a work environment that encourages employees to put forth their best effort.

Listen
Listening to what your employees have to say and appreciating their unique viewpoints shows respect for them and their ideas. It's one of the best ways to build trust and credibility — two essential ingredients for sustaining a motivating work environment. Plus, people listen more attentively to those who listen to them.

Lead by Example
Take risks. Be willing to make mistakes and learn from them. By doing so, you create an environment that encourages your employees to stretch beyond the boundaries of what they know. Chances are, they'll follow your lead and take risks, too. As a result, they'll reach higher levels of accomplishment and take greater satisfaction in their work.

Share the Big Picture
Give employees a sense of purpose and importance by letting them know how their work benefits others and contributes to the success of the organization.

Build In Variety
Routine, while often necessary, can be dulling. Assigning a variety of tasks or types of projects can help relieve monotony. It also provides the opportunity to cross-train your employees and, as a result, build a stronger team.

Coach When Necessary
It's easy for employees to get frustrated if they're unsure of how to do the job. Make yourself available to help and support employees struggling with a task, learning new skills or taking on new responsibilities.

Maintaining a Positive Workplace

Maintaining a Positive Workplace

Support Collaboration

Isolation does nothing to support creativity. We all need opportunities to socialize, exchange information and solve problems informally. Find ways to intentionally create interaction among your employees. You might hold regular group meetings and establish times for one-to-one consultation. Set up brainstorming sessions where the team works together to solve problems and enhance communication.

Evaluate Results

At the end of big projects, it's a good idea to take the time to review the successes and failures of the project together as a team. Build the review around four questions:

1. What did we do well?
2. What did we do poorly? You might start the ball rolling by mentioning something that you think you could have done better. This will help people understand that the meeting is about learning, not blaming.
3. What did we learn from this?
4. How can we do better next time?

And, remind them that it's important to acknowledge failure in order to learn how to do something better the next time. Then, begin the next project with a review of the lessons learned.

Create Challenges and Choice

Assign projects that will help employees grow and let them take the lead in figuring out how to get the job done. This gives your team a challenge — and pride in their work when the challenge is met. The sense of accomplishment and freedom also helps build interest and confidence as employees feel more powerful and personally responsible. Of course, you should be sure that your employees are set up for success — make sure they have all the tools they need and check in on a regular basis to offer guidance.

> Keep in mind that different people are driven by different things. Given the diversity of people and personalities in the workplace, no single type of motivation can inspire everyone. Take the time to find out the needs and ambitions of the people who work for you.

Inspiring Teamwork

Teams are a big part of work life today. Whether as part of a corporate project team or on the staff in a restaurant, few of us work in jobs where we rely only on ourselves to get everything done. When you combine people with varied backgrounds and experiences, you end up with many different personalities and opinions. As a manager or team leader, how do you turn this eclectic mix into a productive team? Here are some ideas.

- **Make the purpose clear.** Ensure that all team members understand specifically what the team is supposed to accomplish. Depending on the team, this purpose can range from one specific project to a developmental goal of the entire organization.

- **Align individual goals with the team's goals.** It is shared desire, not talent, that builds teamwork. Inspire your team by clearly stating how each member's duties contribute to the team's success. Also, know your employee's interests and, whenever possible, give them responsibilities that fit their goals.

- **Utilize the differences in your team.** You have a unique set of people with unique skills and attributes. Be aware of these differences as you assign tasks, and try to allow employees to share their knowledge. For example, teaming a less-experienced computer programmer with an expert gives both a chance to further their skills, whether it be programming or mentoring.

- **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Continually check the progress of the overall project to ensure that team members don't dwell too much on minor points.

- **Assume the best in people.** While it's easy for team members to blame each other if a problem occurs, a good team can rise above finger-pointing and focus on the task at hand. It's important to establish up front, and continually reinforce, a common assumption that all team members do their best. And, when things go wrong, the entire team shares the responsibility. This approach frees your team to focus on fixing problems. See "Evaluate Results" under "Creating a Motivating Environment" on Page 20 for ideas.

Maintaining a Positive Workplace

Praising Employees

Employees don't live by salary alone. Personal appreciation and recognition also are an important part of job satisfaction. Besides being an esteem-booster, praise can be an effective teaching tool, telling employees what they're doing right and encouraging them to keep doing it.

Keys to effective praising:

- **Consult employees first.** Each person reacts to praise differently, so ask each employee how he or she would like to receive positive feedback. For example, would the person like to be praised in front of co-workers, or prefer a private note instead? The Employee Recognition Questionnaire on Page 24 can help you determine the best way to praise your employees.

- **Praise immediately.** Don't save it for the annual review. The longer you wait to praise an achievement, the less effective the praise will be.

- **Be specific.** State the exact behavior you're praising and its importance to you and the organization. For example, instead of saying:

  "I see you made a new schedule. Thanks."

  Consider saying:

  "This new schedule you worked out gives us better coverage on our shift. We won't have to scramble when it gets busy, and that will make all our lives easier. Thank you very much."

- **Mean what you say.** Be honest and sincere. Phony praise is easy to spot and your employees will resent it.

- **Share team credit.** Make sure everyone gets credit in a team effort, and stress the specific contributions of each member of the team.

- **Leave praise on its own.** Separate praise from reprimands and criticism, so it doesn't seem like sugar-coating.

- **Recognize the little things.** Routine jobs also contribute to the department and organization, so be sure to acknowledge them. And, don't overlook employees who are on time and always do their jobs well.

Giving Feedback for Improvement

Giving an employee feedback on poor performance can be one of the toughest jobs a manager can do. However, an employee who's not working up to standards can put the remainder of your team under considerable stress. It also can hurt morale if responsible workers have to keep compensating for someone else's poor performance.

Tips for effective feedback:

- **Be honest and prompt.** Provide candid feedback in a timely and professional manner.

- **Keep it private.** Give feedback in your office or a private setting away from other employees.

- **Focus on facts.** This can be an emotional experience for both you and the employee. Focusing on the facts helps you be more objective, and the employee less defensive.

- **Focus on the behavior, not the person.** Don't dwell on personality; it's difficult to correct an employee's poor attitude. But, you can address specific behaviors, like a slow response to a customer asking for assistance.

- **Stay balanced.** Giving feedback to employees only when they're doing something wrong can make work frustrating or discouraging, so be sure to provide praise when deserved. People want to know when they're doing something right.

- **Explain your reasons.** Let the employee know that you're giving feedback to help him or her be more effective on the job.

- **Listen to the employee's perspective.** Ask how the person feels about the feedback and if he or she agrees with you. Discussing the feedback can make it easier for your employees to accept. The employee also may give you some insight that can help solve the performance problem.

- **Give direction.** When providing feedback for improvement, clearly show how to perform the task correctly. This way, you spend more of your time reinforcing desired behavior.

- **Follow up on compliance.** Only the employee can decide whether to accept your feedback. If he or she repeatedly ignores it, you may have to consider disciplinary action.

- **Take as you give.** Give your employees opportunities to give feedback on your performance as well.

Use the following questionnaire to help you determine how your employees would like to receive recognition for good work performance. Feel free to design your own survey based on your specific workplace situation. Check with your Human Resources representative about the feasibility of the non-monetary rewards mentioned in Question 2.

Employee Recognition Questionnaire

Completed by: _____

Job Title: _____

Date: _____

1. How do you like to be appreciated for your accomplishments?

Style:

In person or otherwise (e.g., via e-mail, voice mail, note, etc.)?

_____

Privately or publicly?

_____

If publicly, do you prefer it to involve colleagues, senior/executive management, both, other?

_____

Timing:

Do you prefer to be recognized for your achievements:

☐ At the end of a project (less frequently, for large tasks completed)?

_____

_____

☐ On an ongoing basis (more frequently, for small achievements throughout a bigger project)?

_____

_____

2. In addition to recognition, what types of rewards are meaningful to you (e.g., money, comp time, movie tickets, pizza party, group outings)?

_____

_____

3. Is there anything you'd like to add or suggest regarding recognition?

_____

_____

Delegating Work

Let's say the boss has just handed you the juicy assignment of evaluating the organization's need for a new sales office in the eastern region. While flattered by the vote of confidence, you're still planning the budget for the next quarter and that statistical analysis has been sitting in your inbox for the past week.

With today's workloads, there are more responsibilities on your plate than hours in a day. But, with effective delegating, you can streamline your workload — freeing up time and energy to focus on the high-priority tasks that require your complete attention. At the same time, you'll boost the skills, experience, confidence and enthusiasm of your team.

Here are some tips for delegating effectively:

- **Set priorities.** Determine which tasks you can delegate and which jobs you absolutely must do yourself. Be prepared to delegate some work that you enjoy. It's the most important work — not always the most fun — that you must keep for yourself. Of course, some delegated work is bound to be boring or trivial. But, if your employees know you'll also reward them with valuable assignments that can advance their careers, they'll willingly accept their share of menial jobs.

- **Pick the right employee for the job.** Delegating means entrusting a person to do a task for which you are responsible. You want the job done well. Match the task to the person on your team with suitable interests, experience and skills. Also, consider someone who would benefit most in growth and development by taking on the added responsibility.

- **Communicate the job clearly to your delegate.** You can't expect people to successfully carry out a vague assignment. Make your expectations clear, providing a model of the result you expect — such as a similar report — for the delegate to use as a guide.

- **Think of delegating as an investment.** Don't fall into the "it will take longer to explain it than to do it" trap. No one wins in this situation. The first time you delegate a particular type of project to someone, it may require a lot of time. But afterward, the employee who handled the assignment will be empowered to do more and do it independently.

- **Provide the means along with the task.** Be sure to give the person enough time, resources, decision-making authority and available budget, if needed, to get the job done.

- **Set deadlines.** Make sure all deadlines — for the entire task or certain portions of the work — are clearly spelled out. Don't say, "When you get time, work on this." The project may remain untouched for weeks.

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Maintaining a Positive Workplace

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• **Focus on results, not methods.** Remember, you're delegating. It's okay if your employee uses a different document format or prepares his or her plan in an unfamiliar way, as long as it achieves the result you want. Letting delegates do the work in their own way makes them more productive and confident. And, you may learn something by watching a talented subordinate do things differently.

• **Balance freedom and control.** While you should give your delegate enough freedom to suit his or her working style, you should ask for regular progress reports to ensure the work is on track. These reports also allow opportunities for you to provide feedback. Be sure to let the delegate know how often you plan to touch base and by what means — e-mail telephone, face-to-face meetings, etc.

• **Leave the door open.** Reassure the delegate that you're available for him or her if there are any questions or unforeseen problems.

• **Share the success.** Sing the praises of delegates who complete assignments successfully. Tell the delegates, their peers and even senior management. Who knows? You may be grooming a successor so that you both can move on to bigger and better things.

A Process, Not an Event
Don't expect delegating to come naturally. Working by proxy is difficult, especially when you can do the job better or faster yourself. A good way to take the delegation plunge is to start small. Choose a discrete task that shouldn't take too long and that wouldn't spell disaster if things don't go as expected. And, if you're really nervous, be honest and tell the delegate. Set an earlier project deadline for the delegate to give you time to review the work before it's due.

Managing Employee Burnout
When employees are exhausted — either physically or emotionally — frustration, indifference, absenteeism and even resignation can result. This hurts both team performance and the organization's bottom line.

What can you do when employees show these signs of burnout? First, try to find out the reason so you can address it directly. Following are a few common causes of burnout and some strategies to resolve them.

The Job Itself
Sometimes burnout results from the work environment, particularly in stressful jobs that involve lots of long hours and tight deadlines. Burnout happening to several employees in the same job is a strong indicator that the job may be at fault.

What you can do:
Ask the employee how he or she feels about the job and if there's anything you can do to improve working conditions. While some of the remedies may be beyond your control, you may be able to negotiate for extended due dates or use outsourced resources to make the workload more manageable.

Employees' Progress Not Meeting Personal Goals

Many people have strict professional goals for themselves or compare their work lives with those of a relative or friend ("When my brother was 35, he was already..."). It's easy for people to get disappointed and stressed when their jobs don't meet their ambitions.

What you can do:
Try to involve the employee in leadership or decision-making activities. Some managers recruit their most talented people to become part of an "executive council" that advises on how to build morale and deal with workforce issues. People brought into such levels of creative planning feel a greater sense of importance, which may help them stay motivated.

Employees with Too Much Going on in Their Lives

Trying to balance multiple work and personal obligations can be very stressful.

What you can do:
Check with your Human Resources representative to see if your organization has any benefit programs — such as flextime or referral resources for childcare and eldercare — that can help employees meet their personal responsibilities.

Employees Are Fatigued or Depressed

The burned-out person could simply be deep-down tired. On the other hand, the employee may be suffering from a mild or major form of depression. Fatigue and depression are among the top reasons workers seek medical attention, according to the American Medical Association.

What you can do:
Let the employee know that his or her well-being is important to you. Offer the person a sick or comp day to rest, and encourage him or her to see a doctor. If the employee seems to be more than just tired, suggest he or she talk with the experts at Optum for help and support.

Preventing Burnout

Because people tend to keep their concerns private, many employees may be dealing with these issues without your knowledge. But, you don't have to wait for signs of burnout to do something about it. Make sure your employees are aware of the Optum program — and other workplace benefits, resources and programs available to help people deal with stressful concerns both on and off the job. Also, encourage people to use such services early to prevent small issues from growing into bigger, burnout-causing problems.

Maintaining a Positive Workplace

Dealing with Difficult People

You have to manage a wide range of personalities on your team. While most people are cooperative and reasonable, some employees have annoying behaviors that make them difficult teammates. Despite doing good work, such "difficult people" tend to cause tension and upset co-workers. This can affect team productivity. You may never "like" these people. But, it's important that you understand them and develop techniques to help them be more productive. Here are some typical difficult personalities, with strategies on how to keep them from disrupting your organization.

Dr. No

Often a perfectionist and a pessimist, this person is a professional at raining on everyone's parade. "That will never work" is Dr. No's motto.

When dealing with a pessimist, acknowledge his or her concerns and ask for ideas on how to address them. You also can use Dr. No's habit to your advantage. Running new ideas past such a person can help you prepare for possible objections that may be raised by others.

The Time Thief

This employee takes much more time than needed when talking with you, using digressions and long explanations to keep the conversation going.

Make it clear at the beginning of the conversation that you're happy to talk but that your time is limited. Always ask for the short version of the story.

The Heckler

A verbal bully, this person fires off insults or sarcastic comments while you or other people are talking.

If a heckler interrupts your presentation, you can either ignore the remark or politely ask the person to save all comments until the end. If the comment was an insult, you can challenge the heckler by asking how his comment relates to the discussion. While a bold maneuver, this reply addresses the person's behavior and focuses everyone on the matter at hand.

The Angry Bull
Such aggressive people are demanding and loud, lashing out at those around them.

When dealing with an Angry Bull, start by letting the person vent and blow off steam. Let the employee know that you're trying to understand his or her views by using statements like, "That sounds frustrating" or "I know that you're working hard on this." Many aggressive people aren't used to others really listening to them, so they may be more willing to calm down when speaking with you.

Once an Angry Bull is a bit more composed, suggest a short break and arrange a calmer time to meet and talk about the problem. During that meeting, you also can talk about how the person's temper is hurting the team's performance. And, you can offer Optum as a resource to help the Angry Bull manage his or her anger.

Handling Workplace Conflict

Conflicts are an unavoidable part of life. When a workplace battle strains employee relationships and prevents the job from getting done, you'll have to step in and play peacemaker. The following steps can be used as a starting point for managing employee conflicts.

Step 1: Do your homework.
- Try to get as much factual information about the conflict as you can.
- Evaluate how the disagreement has affected productivity so you can explain the impact of the conflict to the employees involved.
- Find out about organization policies on resolving workplace conflicts.

Step 2: Meet with each individual privately.
- Ask each employee about the problem to get more information.
- Let the person express his or her feelings. But, if the conversation starts to stray into personal opinions, calmly ask the person to stick to the facts of the disagreement.
- Be fair and impartial. Don't take sides or cast blame.
- Explain how the conflict is affecting the workplace. For example, perhaps uninvolved employees are gossiping about the argument instead of discussing work issues.
- Discuss your organization's policies regarding job conflict. Let the employee know what behavior isn't appropriate in the workplace. Be upfront about any consequences or disciplinary actions that may result if the conflict continues.
- Ask the employee about his or her thoughts for solutions, assessing their willingness to resolve the conflict.

Step 3: Hold a joint meeting.

- Bring both parties together in a safe, private forum where they can talk openly to resolve the problem.
- Be fair and impartial. Give each person the same amount of time to speak. Try not to show support for either side, despite any efforts to win you over.
- Allow each employee to explain his or her version of the problem. Don't let one party interrupt while the other is talking. You can tell the person, "You will get a chance to talk in a moment."
- Have each person restate the other's view of the problem. This can help both sides fully understand each other's point of view. Ask each party to confirm the accuracy of the other's restatement to be sure that everyone has been heard.
- Ask each employee to suggest solutions to the problem. While it's possible that you may have developed your own solution, people are usually more committed to ideas they come up with on their own.
- If the employees offer no solutions, or the suggestions are impractical or unacceptable, then you'll have to propose your own solution. This may involve you taking a side. If so, be sure to fully explain the reasons behind your decision. Tell the other party why you feel it's the best way to go. Otherwise you risk alienating the other party.
- Ask each employee to restate the solution so there are no misunderstandings. Be sure everyone is committed to carrying it out.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting to check the employees' progress on resolving the conflict.

Of course, managers aren't expected to be expert mediators, and workplace conflicts are as varied as the people involved. No single approach will work for every situation. Consult with your Human Resources representative for more information and advice.

You also can call Optum management consultants for further assistance. While the specialists don't provide mediation services per se, they can help you develop strategies and tactics for dealing with the conflict you're facing. They also can help you locate qualified professional mediators in your area, if needed. And, the Optum Workplace Effectiveness team offers workplace seminars on how to manage employee conflicts.

Want to find out more about improving employee productivity and managing workplace issues? Here are a few of the many publications available on the subject.

Learning More

Dealing with People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst, by Rick Brinkman

First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently, by Marcus Buckingham

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic, by Stephen R. Covey

Management Challenges for the 21st Century, by Peter F. Drucker

Beyond the Hype: Rediscovering the Essence of Management, by Robert G. Eccles and Nitin Nohria, with James D. Berkley

Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence, by Daniel Goleman

The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management, by Jerry B. Harvey

How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation, by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

Enlightened Leadership: Getting to the Heart of Change, by Ed Oakley and Doug Krug

Seeing Systems: Unlocking the Mysteries of Organizational Life, by Barry Oshry

Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World, 3rd edition, by Margaret J. Wheatley

You also can call Optum for further assistance and advice. You can request a training program or schedule a management consultation with a management consultant during regular office hours. And, other Optum services are available all day, every day. These services provide you and your employees with information and support to help maintain a productive team and a healthier, happier work environment.

Notes

We listen. We care. We help.

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