

“IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO ADDRESS PERFORMANCE ISSUES”



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Why have you been avoiding addressing the performance issue that has been going on for months or even years? Perhaps you are comfortable with the person or have developed a personal fondness that prevents you from speaking up, despite his or her professional limitations. Perhaps you have developed an adequate work-around for all this time. Perhaps the thought of interviewing for a replacement stresses you out. Or maybe you just don't have the confidence or interpersonal skills to address it effectively.

Poor performance costs an organization untold dollars in inefficiencies, missed deadlines, project delays, cost over-runs, and alienated relationships, including lost customers or employees. To those around you, your inability or unwillingness to address the employee issue is more than obvious. They lose respect for you when you do not make others accountable for their performance. Your valuable high-performing employees will eventually get frustrated and leave.

The good news is it is never too late to make a change. The first and most difficult aspect is that you need to admit your own part in withholding necessary feedback from the person until now. Once you have recognized that you no longer can allow the unacceptable behavior that has lingered, do not wait until the next scheduled performance appraisal. Do it now.

Start by creating a private setting when where the two of you can have your discussion with no interruptions. Then give the 1-2-3 message; 1- admit your failure to address the issue previously and apologize to the person, taking full ownership. 2- let them know what has been the behavior or lack of performance that is unacceptable and needs to be improved. 3 - offer a clear expectation of what needs to occur going forward, with your full and sincere support.

It might go something like this: "Donna, I owe you an apology. There have been certain aspects of your performance that have been unacceptable, and, not wanting to hurt your feelings, I haven't communicated it to you. I'm sorry. I wasn't speaking up to get the kind of support I needed, and I led you to believe that your performance was satisfactory. That wasn't fair to either one of us. What I have failed to let you know in the past is that your document quality is far below what we need here. Your grammar can be faulty, and spelling errors and inaccuracies are frequent.

"Not trusting the quality of your work, I have insisted on personally reviewing everything before it goes out. I have gotten into the habit of making all of your corrections myself, instead of allowing you to develop your own skills and proficiency. I want to work with you now to turn this around and create a new standard of accuracy and accountability in your documents. You have my full support and if that means sponsoring classes for you, I am more than willing to do that....."

If you lack the skills or confidence to take this necessary action, you may want to ask for help from a trusted human resource professional in your organization, or seek the assistance of an outside executive coach. In the end, your under-performing employee will either be motivated to do better, or he or she will start looking for a job elsewhere. Either way, you win.

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