

MONEY OFFICE POLITICS

How to tackle poor employee performance: Constructive criticism, monitoring and a fair process

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by [Matt Gingell](#)

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Don't let a good opportunity for improvement go to waste

Allowing poor performers to remain unchecked can be extremely detrimental to your business and to staff morale. Managers often prefer to turn a blind eye to under-performing employees, hoping that things will improve without the need for intervention. But so often, things don't improve – they actually get worse. This can be detrimental to the employee, and have a negative effect on the rest of the team. So what, as an employer or manager, can you do to tackle poor performance?

START WITH A CHAT

If an employee's work is not up to scratch, the starting point is to raise the issues with them during informal discussions, which should be taking place as a matter of course.

These are opportunities to identify particular areas of concern and provide clear examples of their

shortcomings. It is no good just making vague, general criticisms. Tangible evidence needs to be provided, showing that the employee is falling short of the expected standard.

It's also important to seek an explanation from them. There may be a simple reason for their failings. And it could be that there is a resourcing problem, or other extenuating circumstances that need to be addressed. But if the issue is obviously in the hands of the employee, his or her performance will need to be carefully monitored. If this is the case, the employee should be given guidance, which is as much about encouragement and support as constructive criticism and monitoring.

FOLLOW UP WITH A FORMAL PROCESS

Where the informal route doesn't get the employee back on track, a more formal process may be needed. This would usually involve a number of stages. First, the employee must be told about the required corrective action, and a defined period should be set for them to improve. This is commonly called a performance improvement plan. Managers should be specially clear when communicating where employees need to raise their game, the standard to be reached and the period for achieving the objectives. They should also provide guidance and training as needed.

But if the person in question doesn't fulfill expectations, they could be issued a warning. And a similar process should be repeated at the next stage, with a further opportunity for them to improve. This might result in a second hearing, followed by a final warning and a last chance to turn things around.

If, after the end of the next period, the employee still doesn't make par, dismissal may be the only option. But another disciplinary hearing would be needed before a decision is made. When an employee is dismissed, they should have a right of appeal.

DEALING WITH CLAIMS

A member of staff who is dismissed on poor performance grounds may bring an unfair dismissal claim against their employer. Typical allegations could be that there were no genuine performance issues, that there was insufficient time to improve, or that the objectives were unreasonable. Generally, employees need to have at least two years' service to be able to bring the claim. But they could also try and bring discrimination claims, which have no length of service requirement. For an employer, it's important that a fair process is always followed, so you can defend your position, if needs be.