CORRECTING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

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Part of any manager or supervisor's responsibility is to monitor the performance of employees. When performance deteriorates the manager or supervisor must act to restore it. These steps are meant to help you do just that.

STEP 1: _Recognition_	A pattern of **poor performance** extending over a period of time is **recognized by the manager**. Inform the employee of the recognized problem and allow some time for improvement. In the next step you will observe if there are continual problems or improvements during the observation period.
STEP 2: _Observation_	This is simply the **observation** of the pattern of **behavior** and an exploration of its impact on work **over time**. When later shared with the employee, this information assists him or her in the problem-solving process.
STEP 3: _Documentation_	This involves keeping **a written log of the observations made over time**, which serves to help the manager and employee see exactly what is going wrong.
STEP 4: _Feedback_	Using the **information** from the written log, the manager/supervisor **presents it back to the employee**. Then, with the employee, the manager helps to define the specific problems.
STEP 5: _Resolution_	Use the documented information and discussion with the employee to **develop a problem statement that will eventually lead to a resolution of the problem**. That's the ultimate goal – resolution of the problem. By working with the employee, the manager/supervisor can look at possible options for solving the defined problem. Will additional training help? Is this a point where progressive discipline is needed? Would a referral to the EAP help? After establishing mutually agreed upon performance expectations and criteria for determining success, the manager/supervisor continues to monitor job performance and the employee implements his or her planned set of options. In other words, **a specific plan with goals is agreed upon and followed.**

Coaching

Coaching involves meeting with the employee to discuss what is expected of him or her, and to point out how observed performance is failing to match these expectations. This discussion should take place at the earliest possible stage and needs to continue until the problem is resolved.

Some goals of the coaching process are:

- to identify for the employee the performance concerns in clear terms
- to discuss the specific behavior problems that you have identified
- to identify obstacles to improvement
- to establish objectives and time frames for improvement

Guidelines for Conducting a Coaching Session

- Prepare your information & discussion outline in advance.
- Conduct the session in a confidential setting & in a constructive manner.
- Clear your calendar and provide plenty of time for the discussion.
- Focus the discussion on specific job performance difficulties.
- Detail for the employee his or her job responsibilities and where performance has been failing.
- Highlight what the employee does well.
- Avoid trying to diagnose a personal problem – stick to the job performance issues.
- Ask the employee for his or her feedback.
- Set up a plan for improvement. Outline what you expect and set firm time limits. Be very clear about what the employee can expect if he or she fails to improve performance according to the mutually agreed upon plan.
- Document your discussion with the employee and the agreed upon performance improvement plan.

Constructive Confrontation

Once you have identified problematic performance, it is critical to confront it in a timely fashion. The goals of constructive confrontation are to address the behavior, not the person, and to encourage change in behavior. The constructive confrontation process works. The keys to success are planning, early intervention and follow through.

There are 4 elements of constructive confrontation.

1. Non-Judgmental Statements of Fact

- Accurately describe the specific behavior
- Are a description of behavior based only on your own observations (what you have seen & heard)
- Focus on the behavior, not the person
- Are objective
- Make no judgments
- Do not begin with a question
  For example: "What's wrong with you?" "Do you have some kind of problem?"
- Do not make inferences or assume motives about what caused the behavior
  For example: "You deliberately cut me off!" "Is something else in your life causing this?" "You must be drinking too much lately."

2. Statements of Effect

- Clearly state the impact of the given facts.
- Identify how the behavior did not meet expectations or standards.
- Identify how the behavior caused other problems.

3. Expectations About Desired Change

- Tell what you want to see happen.
- Describe the specific changes in behavior that will remedy the situation.
- Give specific time frames.
- Describe the consequences of not meeting the expectations when appropriate.
- Identify that the use and support of the EAP may also be helpful.

4. Awareness & Control of Feelings

- Be aware of your own feelings.

- Expect defensiveness.
- Focus on performance.
- Stay calm and relaxed.
- Be caring, but avoid getting personally involved.
- Watch your volume and tone of voice.
- Watch your body language.
- Avoid sarcasm.

Referring an Employee to the EAP

An employee assistance program (EAP) is a work-site-based program that is designed to assist in the identification and resolution of productivity problems associated with employees impaired by personal concerns. The EAP can be used as the following:

- A _confidential resource_ that helps employees _identify and deal productively_ with personal problems including relationship problems, family issues, stress, alcohol, drugs, legal questions and financial difficulties.
- Assistance for employees whose _personal problems_ may be _affecting their job performance_
- A _resource for information_ on a wide variety of work–life topics
- A resource to _help you be a more effective & efficient manager_

The EAP is based on the following concepts and assumptions:

- From time to time, every individual experiences personal or workplace problems that challenge one's ability to cope or problem-solve
- Personal or workplace problems sometimes impact job performance, despite one's best intentions
- When job performance declines, it is the responsibility of the manager/supervisor to constructively address these job issues directly with the employee

The best ways to address these issues are by:

- Taking action,
- Consulting with a human resources representative, and
- Providing help by referring the employee to the EAP.

Why Encourage Use of the EAP?

- It is not cost effective to lose trained & experienced personnel.
- _Anyone_ can experience a personal problem _at anytime_; the EAP is available to assist 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Employees who receive help can be restored back to expected levels of performance and productivity with minimal disruption to the individual & workplace.

The worksheet on the next several pages helps supervisors and managers prepare for a coaching or constructive confrontation discussion with employees. Supervisors and managers may want to make several copies of these worksheets to have available.

Your EAP is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week to provide assistance and consultation as your prepare for the coaching or constructive confrontation discussion with your employee.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Correcting Performance Problems: A Supervisor's Worksheet

Employee Name: _____Date: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

I. Preparation: Concerning work performance behavior:

How does the employee's behavior impact work outcome, work teams, the organization and/or the customer?

Does the employee have the knowledge, skills and aptitudes necessary for their work role? If no, what are the limitations?

Does the employee have a clear understanding of his/her work responsibilities? Have they been given a written job description, training, etc.?

What has been documented to date regarding the employee's work performance? What needs to be documented on a go-forward basis?

What policies and procedures apply to this performance problem? (Note: These may be operational policies or Human Resource policies)

Based on company policy what should be my next steps in addressing performance issues? Should a representative from human resources be consulted?

Is the employee aware of company policies and procedures as they relate to his/her job performance?

How does the employee's performance or behavior need to improve?

How will you know when the employee's performance or behavior has improved?

What are time expectations for improvement and how will I monitor this?

II. Stating the Need for Improved Performance:

Describe the work performance / behavior problem and its impact in two to three sentences.

State the needed change in work performance/behavior

Identify the company policy (if applicable) that addresses the performance problem/behavior:

III. Employee Perception / Feedback:

What do you believe the employee will identify as the cause of the problem?

Is additional training necessary?

How do you expect the employee to react to the need for improved performance?

How do you personally plan on responding in order to remain focused on the employee's job performance?

Ask the employee to identify how he/she can improve their work performance.

Has your perception of the problem or strategies to resolve the problem changed? If so, how?

What company resources are available to support you in your role as supervisor as well as available resources to support the employee?

IV. Next Steps:

Identify the steps you will take to address the performance problem. This might include actions required by company policy and procedures, a follow up meeting to review performance or an informal or formal referral to the EAP.

Set up a follow-up meeting date.

Document the discussion and follow up plans.

Referring an Employee to the EAP

Informal Referral

When a manager identifies some change in performance and/or behavior, a referral to the EAP can be made early in the process. The manager expresses his / her concern to the employee "informally," without initiating the corrective action process. The manager does not counsel the employee but suggests the employee contact the EAP. No information is given to the manager regarding the employee's participation in the EAP.

Example: Susan approaches you as her manager and shares with you that she is struggling to maintain childcare for her 5-year-old son. To your knowledge, Susan has never missed or been late to work nor are there any job performance concerns. You informally recommend to Susan that she may want to contact the EAP, as they may be able to provide her support and linkage to possible childcare resources.

Formal Referral

If performance continues to deteriorate, a formal referral to the EAP can be made. **Formal referrals to the EAP must be consistent with the company's EAP policy.** Your part in the referral process is:

1. Contact the EAP to discuss making a formal referral. Explain your concern about the particular employee's performance, indicating the behavior problems you have previously documented.

2. Together with the EAP counselor, you will discuss a plan of action regarding approaching the employee for a constructive confrontation.

3. Discuss the plan with your own manager or human resource department to make sure the referral follows company policies and procedures.

4. Meet with the employee to share your concerns and ask the employee to call the EAP. Explain to the employee that their participation in the program is ultimately optional; however, their performance will continue to be monitored. Inform the employee that he or she will be asked to sign a release of information but that the extent of the information that will be shared is (1) whether or not the employee contacted the EAP; and (2) whether or not he/she is following through with the recommendations of the EAP. No other specific information will be disclosed.

Example: Robert has reported to work 30 to 45 minutes late six times over the last month and a half. As Robert's supervisor you have documented this problem and provided Robert a verbal warning consistent with company policy. You have also decided to make a formal referral of Robert to the EAP using the following language:

The Sometimes Speech

"Sometimes job problems like these are the result of things going on outside of the workplace. It may not be true in your case, and it's really none of my business. However, because it is true sometimes, the company does have an Employee Assistance Program. It is confidential and available at no cost to you. It has helped a lot of people. I encourage you to contact the EAP."