

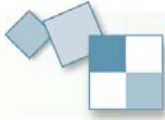
Managing the Troubled (and Troubling) Employee

Employees exhibiting patterns of deteriorating job performance, interpersonal difficulties and/or erratic behaviour can be one of the most difficult situations for managers or supervisors. If these are not addressed, such concerns can lead to reduced organizational morale, declining productivity, labour grievances and conflict amongst coworkers. Many managers are uncertain about how to approach a troubled employee. Some are fearful that this will make the situation worse and choose to ignore it, whereas others may have difficulty being objective due to their own frustrations and intervene in a manner that is inappropriate, intrusive and ineffective. Either course of action does a disservice to the employer, the other employees...and the individuals themselves. Some of the signals that action is required may include:

- Unusual changes in productivity
- Accidents, mistakes or lack of judgement
- Complaints from customers or co-workers
- Unexplained absence, illness or tardiness
- Emotional outbursts or strange behaviour
- Interpersonal conflict or withdrawal

If you are in a position of responsibility and are aware of such behaviours you need to act promptly and appropriately. You need to provide constructive feedback, in other words have a direct conversation with the employee about their behaviour that is relevant to their performance and functioning at work. Get the facts. Don't rely on second hand information or innuendo. Focus on those observable behaviours that are relevant to performance. Once you have done this, meet with the individual. Some steps to bear in mind include:

- Get to the point. E.g." I asked you here to discuss....".
- Be clear why you are having this conversation. E.g. "I have a concern about.."
- Describe what you know focusing on specific behaviours e.g. "I observed ..."
- Describe why this behaviour concerns you e.g." This is a change from your usual performance and..."
- Describe the consequences of such ongoing behaviour e.g. "This behaviour could undermine our work by..."
- Provide an opportunity for the employee to respond e.g." That is what I know but I'd like to hear your point of view..."
- Determine a mutually agreed resolution of the problem e.g." We agree that you need to complete your work on time."
- Discuss possible options that will assist the employee in reaching the desired outcome e.g. "How can I help you achieve the goal of..."
- If there is a need to seek advise or support from an external resource such as an EFAP, union representative or healthcare provider, provide the information needed E.g. "If there are personal, workplace or family issues that are contributing to this concern..."



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- Identify what mutual specific actions will be done, when and by whom e.g. “We agree that you and I will meet next week and ...”
- Set an opportunity to meet within an agreed period of time e.g. “Let’s get together in two weeks to discuss this how this is going...”
- Document the process in a factual and concise manner and share this with the employee

It is important to recognize that, while these conversations may be difficult, they can serve as an invaluable opportunity to enhance the resiliency of those for whom you are responsible. They serve to clarify values and goals, solve problems, reinforce competencies and provide realistic feedback and support.