

Not all your employees will give a 100%. Some will have personal issues that interfere with their work. Technically it's not your problem, but in reality any issue that contributes to an underperforming employee is, makes it your problem.

Things like:



- **unsatisfactory work performance, that is, failure to perform the duties as per their job description or failure performing it to the standard required**
- non-compliance with workplace policies, rules or procedures
- unacceptable behaviour in the workplace
- disruptive or negative behaviour that impacts on co-workers.

Underperformance does not equal misconduct.

Misconduct is very serious behaviour such as theft or assault which may warrant instant dismissal.

What causes underperformance?

There are many reasons why an employee may perform poorly. Some of the most common reasons include:

1. an employee doesn't know what is expected because goals and/or standards or workplace policies and consequences are not clear (or have not been set);
2. interpersonal differences;
3. a mismatch between an employee's capabilities and the job they are required to undertake, or the employee does not have the knowledge or skills to do the job expected of them;
4. an employee does not know whether they are doing a good job because there is no counselling or feedback on their performance;

5. lack of personal motivation, low morale in the workplace and/or poor work environment;
6. personal issues such as family stress, financial stress, physical and/or mental health problems or substance abuse;
7. cultural misunderstandings;
8. workplace bullying.

Underperformance should be dealt with promptly and appropriately by an employer, as employees are often unaware they are not performing well and thus are unlikely to change their performance.

Best practice employers understand that issues, which are not addressed promptly, also have the potential to become more serious over time. This can have a negative effect on the business as a whole as it can affect the productivity and performance of the entire workforce.

How to solve the problem

Step 1: Train your managers to handle underperformance

Provide training to managers on how to handle underperformance issues. It may be helpful to include role play workshops in the training material so that managers can learn how to approach matters in real-life scenarios. Well trained managers are better able to identify and address issues of underperformance.

List of workshops:

https://www.isosolved.com/workshop_list.asp

Or email corrie@isosolved.com to arrange a private in-house workshop with all your managers / supervisors.

Step 2: Make sure the job description is to the point and clear

Organisations tend to write job descriptions vague so that the employee cannot turn around with words like "it is not part of my job".

You have to specify exactly what needs to be done by the person at what time. If the job description is not clear enough, change it and ask the person that should do the job

to write the detail. Make sure all aspects are covered and let him/her sign it before enforcing it. You can even have a weekly and monthly checklist.

When I assist organisations with in-house workshops, I use their own job descriptions to show what they should be doing every week and most of the time they don't do what is specified in their job descriptions.

Step 3: Get the balance between the carrot, the stick and love the animals.

The carrot:

Recognition, Empowerment, Supportive Feedback, Consideration, Trust, Rewards and Incentives.

The stick:

Counselling sessions, disciplinary actions and as last resort dismissal or retrenchment.

Love them:

Rub on the shoulder for work completed, honest caring, listen to them, make eye contact, smile and appreciate their effort, wanting them to make a success.

There needs to be balance between all of them. Shockingly, most businesses use only the carrot!

Step 4: Try and employ the best employee

It sounds simple but so many managers only decide based on their gut feel or interview only 2 people and then choose the best one.

There are various tests you can utilise to determine the talent of the person; e.g. using the High Level Figure Classification test.

In one of our organisations we had a lady who worked quick, efficient and her output was equivalent to 3 people at our opposition. She received a salary of 2 people but we scored a salary and our clients were receiving an above average service from her. We tried to determine what makes a person works like that and the answer was;

"It was the way they grew up in the house". So the conclusion: rather phone the parents if they are still alive and determine what was expected from the children and how the child performed under those rules.

If the parents don't live anymore (are deceased), ask the relevant questions in your interview:

"Did you have a maid that cleaned your house?" With any response ask: "With what did you help your parents at home?" The answer will give you a good idea if they were brought up in a house where they had to work and had to do it well.

Step 5: Identify the underperforming area and cause to identify the best solution:

Example 1

Issue:

- Employee fails to undertake the work as required, showing signs of apathy and laziness.
- Employee does not appear to understand job requirements or directions.

Possible Causes:

- Job content and design
- Inappropriate job fit
- Personal or external issues.
- Supervisor not issuing the command clearly

Solution:

1. Begin with an informal performance discussion
2. Be clear about the performance requirements and expected contribution of the role to the work of the business.
3. Focus on interest in work tasks, and how they might be improved.
4. Explore options for opportunities in other areas of the business, if possible.

5. Refer to counselling service if personal circumstances are impacting performance.

Example 2

Issue:

- Employee will not follow directions or perform tasks as required.

Possible causes:

- Failure to understand what is required
- Inability to perform tasks
- Personal issues.
- Blatant challenging of authority

Solution:

1. Begin performance improvement process starting with informal discussions around what is required in the position. Look at possible options for training and development if a skill deficit is identified.
2. Commence formal performance management process, through the disciplinary route, if no improvement forthcoming.

Example 3

Issue:

- Employee fails to acknowledge they are underperforming.

Possible causes:

- Performance issues have not been adequately explained
- Process has not been adequately applied.
- Employee does not accept management assessments.

Solution:

1. Re-establish expected outcomes, use evidence of how performance has failed to meet expected standards, explain the impact of this on the success of the business.
2. Where necessary commence formal performance management process, through the disciplinary route.

Example 4

Issue:

- Employee does not complete work tasks to the required standard.

Possible causes:

- Lacks the required skills and capabilities.
- Know that nobody is checking it
- The employee thinks excuses will redirect the problem as not his problem

Solution:

1. Identify training and development opportunities as a part of performance improvement plan.
2. If employee fails to develop required skills, progress through performance management process to possible options such as reassignment of duties, or transfer to another area to achieve a better job fit (if possible)
3. Review recruitment practices to ensure appropriate selection decisions are being made.
4. Commence formal performance management process, through the disciplinary route, if no improvement forthcoming.

Example 5

Issue:

- Employee is cynical of work environment and tasks, bringing negative opinions to the work environment.

Possible causes:

- Has become disillusioned with work environment
- Fails to understand value of work being undertaken

Solution:

1. Let the employee understand why his or her work is valuable to the whole company. Even if he doesn't understand why he can trust the decision of management to ask him to perform the job.
2. Establish team culture based on respect and support. Arrange a helper or mentor to assist him the first time.
3. Re-establish role of the position, and the value of outcomes delivered by the organisation.
4. If possible, explore opportunities for career transition and movement.

Example 6

Issue:

- Employee is regularly absent without cause.

Possible causes:

- Job content and design
- Inappropriate job fit
- Management style
- Personal or workplace issues.
- Employee motivation

Solution:

1. Identify cause behind absenteeism
2. Explore possible strategies for job redesign, job fit, changes to working arrangements, management of health issues.
3. Re-establish expectations of attendance.

Step 6: Confront the employee to discuss the problem (Counselling / Coaching Session)

It is important that the meeting takes place in private and in an environment that is comfortable and non-threatening, away from distractions and interruptions.

The employer should begin by holding a discussion with the employee to explain the problem in specific terms. From this conversation, the employee should be able to clearly understand:

- . what the problem is
- . why it is a problem
- . how it impacts on the workplace, and
- . why there is a concern.

The employer should discuss the outcomes they wish to achieve from the meeting.

The meeting should be an open discussion and the employees should have an opportunity to have their point of view heard and duly considered. The employer should listen to the explanation of why the problem has occurred or to any other comments the employee makes.

When having this type of meeting, it may be useful in facilitating discussion to refer to recent positive things that the employee has done to show them that you also recognise and appreciate their strengths.

Key points for employers to remember when holding the meeting are to:

1. talk about the issue and not the person
2. explore the reasons why there is an issue
3. clarify details

4. stay relaxed and encouraging, and
5. summarise to check your understanding of the situation

And, when discussing shortfalls in any area, it is important to check that the employee:

1. is aware that it is a task that is required of them
2. has been shown what is required
3. understands the gap between what is happening and what is required

Step 7: Jointly devise a solution

Where possible, it is important that a solution is jointly devised with the employee. An employee who has contributed to the solution will be more likely to accept and act on it.

When working out a solution, the employer should:

- Explore ideas by asking open questions
- Emphasise common ground
- Keep the discussion on track
- Focus on positive possibilities, and
- Offer assistance, such as further training, mentoring, flexible work practices or redefining roles and expectations.

A clear plan of action should be developed with the employee to implement the solution. This can be in the form of a performance agreement or action plan. A performance agreement or action plan can:

- reflect an understanding of performance expectations and what is to be achieved over the specified time period (performance improvement milestones)
- clarify roles and responsibilities of the employee
- include strategies for training and career development
- include timeframes for improvement (these may vary depending on the issue and needs of the business, however it is important to give an employee adequate time to improve their performance)

- reinforce the value and worth of the role being performed

A date should be set for another meeting with the employee to review progress and discuss the employee's performance against the agreed action plan.

The employer should keep a written record of all discussions relating to underperformance in case further action is required. Generally, it may also be used as evidence if disciplinary action is taken about the matter.

Step 8: Monitor performance and give feedback

The employer should monitor the employee's performance and continue to provide feedback and encouragement.

A meeting to review and discuss the employee's performance should be held even if there is no longer an issue. This enables both parties to acknowledge that the issue has been resolved. The employer should provide both positive and negative feedback to the employee and should work with the employee to ensure that performance improvements are sustained.

More serious action may need to be taken if the employee's performance does not improve including further counselling, issuing formal warnings and ultimately if the issue cannot be resolved, termination of employment.

1. Devise a solution with the employee to improve performance;
2. Develop an action plan which includes performance improvement milestones and time frames for further review;
3. Schedule another meeting to review the employee's performance against the agreed action plan;
4. Document all discussions, including actions to be taken;
5. Monitor the employee's performance and continue to provide feedback;
6. Follow any steps set out in an applicable industrial instrument (such as an enterprise agreement), the employer's policies and procedures and the employee's employment contract concerning performance management.

To summarise the 8 steps to deal with underperforming employees:

Step 1: Train your managers to handle underperformance

Step 2: Make sure the job description is to the point and clear

Step 3: Get the balance between the carrot, the stick and love the animals

Step 4: Try and employ the best employee

Step 5: Identify the underperforming area and cause to identify the best solution

Step 6: Confront the employee to discuss the problem (Counselling / Coaching Session)

Step 7: Jointly devise a solution

Step 8: Monitor performance and give feedback

So let me guess where you need to start Step 1

But, if you do need help, you are welcome to give us a call to come and assist.

All the best with your employees! You will see the difference when you get it right.

Kind Regards

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