

Terminating Employment of a Poor Performer—Part 1

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Few individuals enjoy terminating the employment of a team member. Not only will you end an individual's source of income, you'll have questions and concerns from the team members who remain.

Further, your own inadequacies come up as you consider what you might have done differently. Maybe you should have spent more time supporting this person when he first joined the team. Perhaps you could have addressed the inadequate performance sooner, providing more thorough coaching.

You are far from perfect. Yet you know you can no longer tolerate the inadequate performance being delivered by this individual. You know you have to take action. What do you do?

First, prepare yourself for harder work than you anticipated---both in confronting the employee and then in diligently observing the employee's performance for several months. Keep in mind that by following this plan, you will achieve several favorable outcomes:

--this employee's performance will no longer be a problem--it will either improve, or the employee will be gone.

--other employees will observe that you've dealt with this individual respectfully and fairly--and they will appreciate you both for taking action with the individual and for doing so with compassion.

--you will have no guilt.

Before you take any action with the employee, obtain support that will minimize putting your organization in legal jeopardy. Read through the following guidelines (and next week's article), formulating a specific plan for your situation. Then go to your Human Resources organization, seeking whatever adjustments are required to satisfy company policy and legal obligations.

Write out a description of each job function the individual has failed to adequately perform:

--What is the proper procedure and the desired outcome?

--What has been the actual performance of the employee?

--Why is the difference unacceptable?

As obvious as this seems to you, some employees don't understand the importance of the deficiency in their performance. To be successful with some individuals, you really do have to be that specific!

Meet with the employee and provide a written copy of your documentation. Encourage the individual to make notes during your dialogue. Express all of the documentation verbally, pausing periodically to invite questions. Expect irrelevant diversions. Patiently persevere in communicating the expected performance, the actual performance to date, and the unacceptable difference.

Ask the employee what barriers or obstacles prevent him from performing acceptable work. Patiently listen, listing all of them on your copy of the documentation. These may sound very much like excuses, of course. Despite this, give no facial expressions or verbal indication of judgment. Just catalogue all of the problems the employee identifies.

After listing the obstacles preventing proper performance, go back through the list and identify what the employee can do to reduce the effect of each obstacle. In contrast to the previous step, you are the primary speaker here, telling the employee what you expect him to do to address each obstacle.

For obstacles beyond the employee's control (probably only a few items), collaborate with him to consider what could be done to eliminate or minimize that obstacle. Determine who (you or the employee) will take the action required to accomplish that elimination or reduction.

These guidelines will be completed next week on Saturday, June 23.

Contact Dennis Hooper at dhooper2@juno.com or at (478)-988-0237. Seek your own Human Resource and legal counsel for actual situations. The above is not sufficient as your legal counsel!