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A SOLAREH SOLUTION

Healthy Teams Collection

Solving a Performance Problem

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Solving a Performance Problem

Because you deal with your staff on a day-to-day basis, you're in a good position to notice sudden or irregular changes in their behaviour. When these changes cause a person's performance to deteriorate, it's often an indication that the employee is having problems in their personal or professional life. When these problems affect how the person does their job, it's time to take action... but sometimes that's easier said than done!

Appropriate and timely intervention can help the employee do something about the problem so they can return to their previous level of productivity. Knowing how to recognize a troubled employee, how to determine the source of the problem, and how to help resolve the situation affecting the employee's performance, will go a long way towards managing people and teams effectively.

Understanding the performance problem

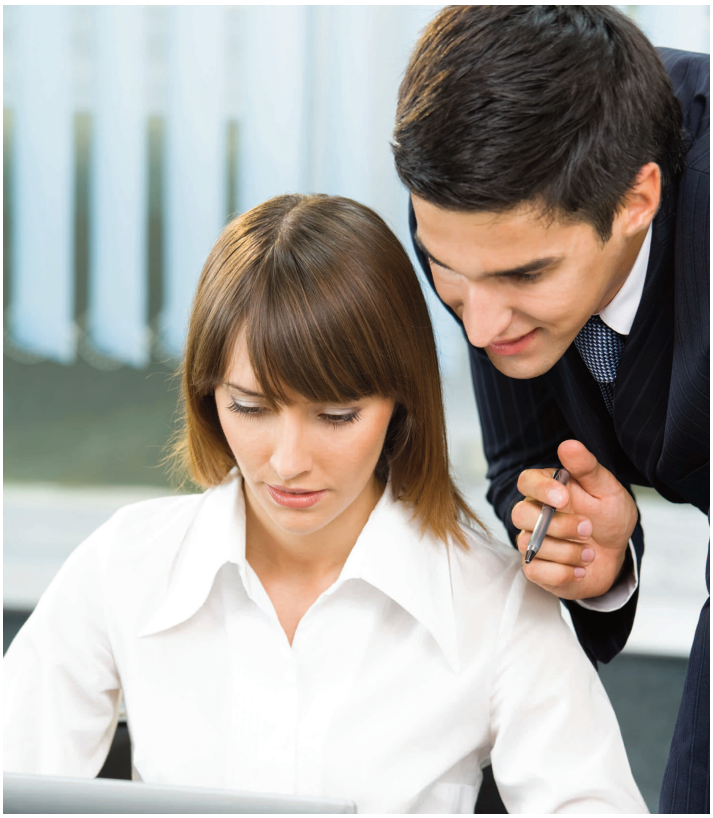
Performance or preference?

The first step in solving a performance problem is to determine whether it's really a question of performance or simply a matter of preference. What's the difference? **A performance problem occurs when an employee is unable to achieve the established objectives**. For example, a sales representative is no longer able to meet their sales objectives, which they always used to do before. This is a question of **performance**. However, if another sales representative has no trouble meeting their objectives, but doesn't use the organization's standardized sales methods, preferring instead to use a method they developed themselves, this is a matter of **preference**. The objectives are being achieved, but not in the desired manner.

The scope of the problem

People often confuse preference issues with performance issues. **A performance problem is strictly related to the achievement of the results (the end), and has nothing to do with how they are achieved (the means)**. Preferences reflect an individual style and can easily be ignored or corrected, which is not at all the case with a performance problem.

The degree of performance and the quality of work should also be judged according to measurable and quantifiable objectives and results. Unfinished sales reports, poor customer service or missed deadlines are the result of behaviours that have a direct impact on an organization's results. On the other hand, how people organize their office, their work or their priorities, generally does not have a direct impact on productivity.



Observing before acting

Changes in a person's attitude towards work can be caused by a number of different factors. Your role as a manager is to assess the situation and take action when the employee's attitudes and behaviours are no longer in line with the requirements of the job. However, action should only be taken **when a person's behaviour is having an impact on the desired results**.

If you try to act as a counsellor rather than focusing on the job requirements and the established objectives, or if you try to change people, their personality, or their way of doing things, you probably won't get the results you're looking for. It will only add to the frustration of your team members.

Don't confuse your role as a manager with that of a counsellor

Warning signs

The sooner you take action, the better chance you have of resolving a performance problem and reducing the risk of absenteeism. By observing your employees' behaviour, you can recognize the warning signs of a problem. Below are some examples of warning signs.

Job performance

- Is not meeting deadlines.
- Makes unlikely excuses for poor performance.
- Alternates between periods of high and low productivity.
- Has difficulty remembering their mistakes.
- Has increasing difficulty performing complex tasks.
- Does not perform as well at certain times of the day.

Punctuality and intermittent absences

- Makes unconvincing excuses to justify lateness and absences.
- Frequently arrives late and leaves work early.
- Tends to leave their workstation frequently (cafeteria, washroom, etc.).

Deteriorating behaviour

- Has difficulty coordinating their movements.
- Arrives at work in an uncustomary state.
- Displays progressively poor personal hygiene.
- Is increasingly nervous, and displays emotional or violent behaviour.
- Has bright or teary eyes, cries frequently.

Poor interpersonal relations

- Tends to isolate themselves.
- Overreacts to criticism.
- Has a bad habit of not returning borrowed items.
- Displays unjustified resentment towards others.
- Demonstrates increasingly hostile attitudes toward co-workers.

High number of accidents

- Sustains accidents due to negligence or carelessness.
- Has an above-average number of occupational accidents.
- Has frequent accidents outside of work.

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Assessing the performance problem

Magnitude of the problem

Once you're certain that you're dealing with a performance problem, you need to determine its magnitude. **To do this, it's essential to look at the facts as opposed to perceptions**. Facts can be described as dates, times, places, situations, words, gestures, etc.

Take the time to determine the gravity of the situation as well. What are the impacts and repercussions of this deterioration in performance? Is it a one-time occurrence or an ongoing problem? Is it a recent development, or has it been going on for a long time? Does the behaviour arise only in specific situations, or is this the employee's general attitude? The questionnaire on the following page is designed to help you determine the seriousness of the problem. **The employee eventually needs to recognize that there is a performance problem, and you need to help them develop an action plan**. The factors you identify in the assessment questionnaire will be very useful for reviewing what is not going well, and what needs to change.

Organizational factors

Employees are not always the only ones responsible for a performance problem. **It might be their work environment that is hindering their motivation**. The source of the problem could be a new procedure, a deferred decision, a major change in responsibilities, a conflict within the team, or a poorly communicated policy. Therefore, before you can take action, you first need to find out if organizational factors may be responsible, in whole or in part, for the performance problem.

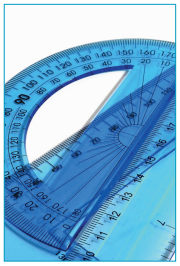
The questions below will help you make your diagnosis. If your assessment reveals certain factors that are contributing to a performance problem, think about what you could do to improve the situation. You will then be prepared to react to any comments the employee might make in this regard, during your meeting.

Working conditions

- Do your team members clearly understand their role and responsibilities?
- Do employees take part in decisions and changes that affect their work?
- Are employees' skills being put to good use in the performance of their functions?
- Do employees feel valued for their contribution to the results of the team and the company?
- Do employees decide on their own work priorities?
- Do employees have the physical and mental capacities and the skills they need to do their jobs according to expectations?
- Are employees encouraged to update their skills?
- Are employees urged to demonstrate initiative and creativity?

Management practices

- Do you give employees enough time to carry out their functions?
- Do you treat all team members equally?
- Do you delegate certain decision-making powers in order to make their work more efficient?
- Do you let employees do their work the way they want to, provided the expected results are achieved?
- Do you take into account your employees' need for work-life balance?
- Do you get employees involved in changes to their working methods?
- Do you use conflict resolution methods?
- Do you take the time to recognize your employees' efforts and achievements?



Employee performance assessment questionnaire

Answer "yes" or "no" to each of the following questions about the employee's behaviour. The "yes" answers will determine which areas you need to focus on.

Name of employee: _____

	Yes	No
Do clients complain about the quality of this person's work?	☐	☐
Do co-workers or your boss make negative comments based on concrete facts?	☐	☐
When you're around other people, are you afraid this person will make inappropriate comments that might embarrass you?	☐	☐
Do you have evidence that this person has lied to you in the past, or concealed the truth?	☐	☐
When you have an important task to assign, do you avoid giving it to this person?	☐	☐
Do you assign tasks that this person should be doing to other people because you know they will be done better and faster?	☐	☐
When you assign this person a task, do they always have some reason for not doing it?	☐	☐
Does this person hinder or disrupt people's work?	☐	☐
Does this person rarely complete their work on time?	☐	☐
Do you have to check this person's work more than you do for other employees?	☐	☐
When you find mistakes, does this person always have an excuse or always blame someone else?	☐	☐
Does someone else often end up doing this person's work?	☐	☐
Once this person completes a task, do they passively wait for you to assign another one?	☐	☐
Is your own work disrupted because you spend so much time solving problems caused by this person or correcting their mistakes?	☐	☐

The more "yes" answers you have, the more serious the performance problem, and the more important it is to act promptly.

If you detect a performance problem, take action right away

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Developing an action plan

Motivation

Performance problems are often related to motivational problems. Why do people lose their motivation? The best way to find out is to ask! Don't rely on guesswork… motivational factors are different for everyone, so ask the person in question to tell you what might boost their motivation at work.

When the problem is work-related, it's up to you to judge the relevance of the reasons given by the employee, and the possible solutions that may be applicable. When the problem is of a personal nature, however, you're more limited in your involvement. **Your responsibilities are limited to the work-related aspect, but when an employee's personal problems are affecting their performance, you can refer them to professional resources**.

Meeting plan

Reason for meeting

Description of the problem (facts)

Impact of performance problem on employee's work

Description of desired situation (expectations)

Possible solutions (from the employee)

Intervention meeting

The purpose of an intervention meeting is to inform the employee that the situation needs to change, and to explain the consequences that will result if the desired changes are not made. It's important that you keep an emotional distance from the situation. The solutions need to come from the employee. **Make sure you focus on the performance problem and stick to the facts**.

If you can take any corrective action (in terms of the organizational factors, for example), talk to the employee about it. However, don't make any promises you can't keep. If the ideal solution isn't possible for whatever reason, remember that getting the person involved in finding solutions will give them a sense of motivation and satisfaction. Get the employee actively involved. **The best suggestions often come from the person experiencing the problem**. You then need to advise the employee of the disciplinary measures that will be taken if changes are not made. Use the meeting plan on the left to remain focused on the purpose of the meeting.

Regularly clarify the employee's roles and responsibilities

Action plan and follow-up

The purpose of the action plan is to help the employee achieve their performance objectives. This plan should be developed jointly with the employee. Your role should be limited to guiding the employee and helping to formulate specific, achievable, and measurable performance objectives. Contributing to the plan's development will give the employee a much greater feeling of commitment and motivation. Lastly, set priorities. **Focusing on too many objectives at one time can be unrealistic, and even demoralizing for the employee**. Instead, choose one or two objectives for the action plan and indicate how they will be achieved, the time frame and, if necessary, what kind of assistance the person requires.

A written action plan shows that you take the situation seriously, and allows you to avoid any misunderstandings about what you have agreed upon with the employee. It also makes it easier to follow up more effectively using the notes recorded in the action plan. If you feel the person has no desire to resolve the problem, you need to warn them about the possible consequences of their behaviour. If the consequences are considerable, administrative measures should be considered, including dismissal. Plan a follow-up meeting in the short term to discuss your assessment of the results achieved since the first meeting.

We all know that employees are an organization's most important asset, but we often tend to forget that. Because of managers' daily concerns, increased responsibilities, and the growing list of things to do with less and less time to do them, managers often cast personnel issues aside.

However, turning a blind eye to a performance problem doesn't help matters at all. On the contrary, it might even make things worse. The time you devote to resolving these kinds of problems will be worth it in the long run, when you see how your actions can optimize the performance and morale of your team!

Professional resources for managers

The Posaction® Plus management assistance program is included in your group insurance contract. The program includes training modules, coaching, a post-traumatic counselling service and psychosocial assistance for troubled employees.

Confidential telephone coaching

- Monday to Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (ET)

1.877.744.2789

Post-traumatic counselling

- Round-the-clock service for serious incidents

1.800.668.0193

For more details about the program
www.posactionplus.com

Posaction® Plus
Your management assistance program

Psychosocial assistance for troubled employees

By referring employees to professional resources, you'll be helping them take concrete steps to resolve their problems and regain their regular performance at work.

Round-the-clock confidential service

1.800.668.0193

- Work-related problems
- Personal problems
- Family problems
- Dependency problems

No charge for using the services

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Other titles available

- Solving an Absenteeism Problem
- Solving a Presenteeism Problem
- Managing Interpersonal Conflict
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- Delegating for Efficiency
- Recruiting the Best Candidates for Your Team
- Making the Most of Your Performance Appraisals
- Motivating and Developing Your Team

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The Healthy Teams collection is part of the Posaction® Plus management assistance program included in your group insurance contract. The program offers tangible solutions designed to improve management practices and prevent absence from work. Additional copies of this module, or copies of other titles in the collection, can be ordered free of charge at **www.posactionplus.com**

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