

7 STEPS TO USE WHEN YOU HAVE TO CONFRONT POOR PERFORMANCE

It starts with a mediocre performance review, the kind where you sense there is something you are not being told. Then you find that you have been left off the project that was agreed as part of your development plan. You suspect that things are happening that do not include you, and you realize you were the last to hear of the changes in company strategy. You are working harder than ever and yet you seem to have lost focus. You are feeling exhausted, anxious and apprehensive, but your boss never seems to have time to talk to you.

And now it's the last day of the month and he wants to see you urgently.

No-one wants to be the victim of a process of such denial and manipulation. Most of us would not deliberately wish it on others. But if you are a manager and you do not confront poor performance amongst your people as soon as you become aware of it, you are denying them the opportunity to fix the problem, and you are guilty of dishonesty.

Ignoring poor performance has never been known to make it go away. The longer it is left, the more likely it is to get worse. While confronting poor performance is not an easy conversation, the steps below provide a framework to get you through it.

Use these seven steps to step up to conversations about poor performance.

1. Set the tone of the conversation. You want to help, not punish. Think through the best outcome both for you and for the employee. Ask yourself if there is any way in which you may be partly responsible for the problem. Were your instructions clear? Did the person have the resources to do the job?
2. Put the facts on the table. Be clear, specific, and honest. Use only as many facts as you need to make your case. Don't overload the conversation with data or you will start to sound accusing.
3. Explain your concerns and the implications if things continue as they are. You need to put your opinion and feelings on the table to add impact to your case and to stress your determination that the situation must change.
4. Ask for the other person's take on the situation. You must obtain their input if you are to get to the bottom of the problem.
5. Generate possible courses of action. Ask more than you tell. You are more likely to get commitment, when the other person makes the suggestions. It can be useful to slow the conversation down at this stage so both of you can think through possible solutions carefully.
6. Agree how performance will be tracked and measured in the future. This is essential to convey how serious you are about solving the problem and that the situation must move forward.

7. Agree on a follow up date. Then stick to it! If the person has not behaved in the way that they committed to, plan the conversation using these same steps to make sure you identify and resolve the remaining problems.

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