

CORRECTING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

PARTICIPANT'S MANUAL

Comprehensive Public Training Program (CPTP)

State of Louisiana

CORRECTING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

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Sponsored by the Louisiana State Civil Service

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CORRECTING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide skills for addressing recurring or serious performance problems in order to get an individual's performance back on track.

JOB OUTCOMES

- Takes appropriate corrective actions with employees.
- Adjusts style, tone, and level of verbal communication to fit the audience and situation.
- Applies appropriate negotiation approaches to find mutually acceptable solutions or conflicts.
- Provides negative feedback constructively.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Recognize why leaders delay correcting poor performance.
- Describe the consequences of delaying action to correct poor performance.
- Identify performance situations that warrant corrective action.
- Explain the benefits of collecting background information prior to a discussion about poor performance.
- Demonstrates a set of key actions for correcting performance problems.
- Conduct focused conversations about poor performance that result in action toward prevention.

CORRECTING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

When an employee’s unacceptable performance or behavior does not change, even after repeated feedback, it creates problems for you, your work group, and the agency.

Correcting performance problems requires special skills – skills that positively influence future behavior and avoid assigning punishment or instilling blame.

The goal of correcting a performance problem(s) is to get an individual’s performance back on track while building motivation for continued improvement.

Video and Group Discussion

What: Watch “Correcting Performance Problems”

How: Watch the video to see the performance problem is handled.

- Use the space below to capture notes about the interaction.

Notes:

KEY ACTIONS FOR CORRECTING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

Conducting a conversation about poor performance can be a challenging task. The situation can become less threatening and more productive when you follow these five key actions.

1. Collect background information.
2. Describe the performance problem.
3. Mutually assess the situation.
4. Agree on an action plan.
5. Offer support.

1. **Collect background information.** The goal of the discussion is to help the person recognize the need to change a behavior and get a commitment to improving performance. This meeting is a high-stakes moment. To be successful, you will need to collect background information on the problem to support your discussion points.

- Clarify the nature of the problem and its negative impact on work schedules, processes, and stakeholders.
- Determine the facts and be specific.
 - Be specific; broad generalizations about what is wrong will not help the person know what to change.
 - If you have not personally observed the behavior in question, check with others. Adopt a neutral, fact-finding approach.
- Uncover possible causes of the problem.
 - Separate the root cause of the problem from the symptoms.
 - Again, use a nonjudgmental approach when checking with others.
- Plan for ways the person might react when you bring up the issue.
 - Try to anticipate the reaction—surprise? Defensiveness? Silence? – and plan your approach accordingly.
 - Consider rehearsing your approach ahead of time with someone you trust.
- If you are in doubt about legal issues and/or relevant agency policies, check with Human Resources.

2. **Describe the performance problem.** It is important to begin the discussion by specifically describing the issue and why it is causing a problem. By focusing on the issue from the start, you help the discussion be productive.

- Begin by making a brief statement about what is off track.
 - Your message should be direct but still convey respect for the other person.
 - Be objective and factual. Include: who, what, when, where, and how many or how often.

- Make it clear whether you are concerned with the results or with the way they were achieved.

- Stay calm. Do not use a punishing tone or attack the person. Be mindful of your body language and word choice.
 - Becoming angry will make it more difficult to reach a productive conclusion.
 - Remember that it is not only what you say but also how you say it that is important. Research shows that body language and tone comprise 90% of the message you are sending.

Small Group Activity

What: Effective Openings

How: Read each opening statement and answer the following questions about each statement.

- What is ineffective about the opening statement?
- How would you improve this statement?

Example 1

We have repeatedly discussed your role within the marketing team. If you want to succeed, you should really try to be more involved. Don't you care about the success of the project?

Example 2

I need to talk with you about your behavior. All of your co-workers are complaining about you, and frankly, I don't have time to deal with this. Let's fix this right now and get back to more important things.

3. **Mutually assess the situation.** The purpose of this key action is to allow the person to express his/her understanding of the problem. In many cases, the person may provide new or different information that changes your perception of the situation. By listening to the person's side of the story, you help foster a cooperative atmosphere and minimize defensiveness.

- Encourage the person to express his/her point of view.
- Form a common picture of what is wrong.
- Identify and tackle major barriers to agreement.
- Collect additional data.
- Summarize the situation in light of what you have learned.

Individual Activity

What: Mutually assess the situation

How: Create three questions you would use to get a person to talk freely about a situation.

Notes:

Group Activity

What: Strategies for anticipated reactions

How: Brainstorm within small groups possible strategies (at least one) to handle challenging reactions when correcting performance problems.

- Individual becomes argumentative
- Individual interrupts
- Individual becomes silent
- Individual becomes defensive
- Individual begins yelling
- Individual blames you, others, or the organization for performance pitfalls
- Individual disagrees with an organizational policy or procedure
- Individual brings up other issues

4. **Agree on an action plan.** The goal here is to reach agreement on a plan that focuses on the next steps and encourages the person to take ownership. This includes helping the person identify possible actions to improve the situation, as well as setting a date for follow-up.

- *Decide if you will require the person to meet certain performance targets for a period of time.*
- *Inform the person of any formal measures you are required to take.*
- *Ask the person what the situation would look like if the problem went away.*
- *Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem.*
- *Ask questions to help the person turn options for solutions into action.*
- *Ask questions to clarify the plan.*
- *Include in the plan strategies for coaching and feedback.*

Individual Activity

What: Agree on an action plan.

How: What must you do to be consistent with your organization's policies? What further actions will you take if the person does not resolve the problem?

Notes:

Group Activity

What: Agree on an action plan

How:

- First, brainstorm strategies for the following situations when developing an action plan due to performance problems.
- Second, decide how to deal with the person whose performance is the problem in the following situations.

Situation

- Person with performance problems takes the matter lightly
- Person with performance problem leaves the meeting abruptly
- Person with performance problem makes verbal threats

Person

- Angry
- Disinterested
- Embarrassed

5. **Offer support.** The person may feel apprehensive about his/her skills and abilities after the discussion. This step lets the person know you are available to help. It is important to leave the person feeling motivated to change and confident in his or her abilities.

- *Let the person know that you are available to clarify issues as they come up.*
- *Express confidence that the person can turn around the situation.*

Individual Activity

What: Offer support.

How: What types of statements will express your support for the person?

Notes:

Video

What: Watch "Demonstrating the Key Actions"

How: As you watch the video, capture your observations on how the key actions are demonstrated.

Notes:

REFERENCES

AchieveGlobal (2004). *Correcting Performance Problems*. Tampa, FL: AchieveGlobal Headquarters, Inc.

JOB AIDS

Ongoing, positive actions on your part can have a measurable effect on the performance of your work group or team. Consider applying some of these proactive strategies.

- Let the members of your staff or team know what you expect of them. Do not assume they can read your mind or think as you do.
- Avoid putting people into jobs for which they are not qualified or trained.
- Since describing performance is an important skill, practice observing people doing things; then give a concise, concrete description of behaviors and their effects. You can practice the role of the observer both in and outside of the office – anywhere you can see people and hear them.
- Observe your thoughts and reactions to poor performance on the part of others. When you need to step in and correct a performance problem, what are your typical barriers? What do you do or tell yourself when you feel stuck?
- Become better acquainted with your Human Resources representatives before you need their help. They will have many useful tips and advice for managing performance problems.
- To become more successful in your role as a coach and developer of others, think of a time when you did not know or did not do your job as well as it could be done. Consider the details of the situation. What was the effect on others when you performed below par? Put these details into a story that you can share with a struggling employee at an appropriate time, as a source of motivation.
- Head off problems. Encourage the members of your work group or team to give you regular, informal reports on how they are doing.
- Help employees know how much detail to give you about performance issues or problems. Coach employees so they can keep reports about both desirable and less-than-desirable performance that are short and focused.
- Consistently document conversations and observations on performance, so you have accurate information and know when to intercede before a problem becomes difficult to correct.
- Develop a problem-solving climate within your work group or team and model a problem-solving approach. Adopting a strategy will encourage the members of your group or team to bring up problems early – when they are easier to solve.

Recurring Behaviors That May Call For Action:

- Jeopardizing relationships with customers
- Failing to keep stakeholders informed of important developments
- Failing to get along with others
- Fostering dissension between groups or teams
- Doing insufficient planning
- Exerting too little or too much control
- Lacking follow-through
- Spending too much time on low-priority work
- Overlooking the impact of decisions on other groups or teams
- Being unwilling to support cross-functional efforts
- Missing deadlines
- Accumulating excessive or unexplained absences
- Misusing electronic information systems