



Dealing with underperformers

The challenge

When faced with an underperforming employee, we often tend either to demand more effort from the rest of the team to compensate, or to put the employee under more pressure. But both these strategies entail real risks. The first can generate tensions and demotivate the team by creating a feeling of injustice. The second generally has little effect... except harming the work atmosphere. However, many underperformance issues can be resolved... provided you devote sufficient time and energy to them and you see the process through.

Three-phase action

Three successive phases of action will provide you with the best chances of reaching a solution:

1

ANALYZE

Many underperformance issues result from a difference between the manager's and the employee's perception of the objectives.

Try to understand where this underperformance comes from

- Look for the **symptoms** of underperformance.
 - Review the employee's results as objectively as possible
 - Sound out his/her peers' opinions to see if under-achievement is linked to a behavioural problem
 - Check that his/her skills are suited to the job
- Compare your perception** of the problem with that of your employee.
 - Get him/her to talk about the situation: does he/she feel good in his/her job? Does he/she feel that there is a problem? Where does he/she think it comes from?
 - Invite him/her to react to your grievances: take a concrete case, explain how his/her work has not been satisfactory.
- Ask him/her to make proposals.** What measures could he/she take to improve performance?

HINT

Ask your employee to write down what he/she thinks his/her three main development objectives are. Do the same and then compare... The result is often surprising...

2

ACT

Changing behavioural patterns takes an average of six months... Define a long-term plan of action.

Re-establish a positive approach

- Clarify the **objectives** of the job and your expectations regarding your employee.
E.g.: List your employee's priorities in a typical week and explain what behaviors you think are necessary to achieve these tasks efficiently.
- Rearrange the **resources** available to the employee if needs be.
E.g.: Help him/her to create monitoring tools.
- Discuss with the HR department on how to develop his/her **skills**.
E.g.: Set-up training, allocate a mentor to help him/her take a step back...
- Adapt your **management style** if necessary.
E.g.: Adopt a more directive style for someone who is a little lost; manage by results more than by means for an experienced employees who feels "mothered".

HINT

Display a calendar and draw-up a road map together with mid-way targets. These objectives must be acceptable for the manager and realistic for the employee.

3

REWARD or SANCTION

If your efforts are successful, don't forget to reward the employee. Otherwise, don't let the situation drag on. Be decisive.

Whatever the result of this process, you must find a satisfactory solution for yourself and your team

Case 1: The employee **has made good progress**. His/her performance has improved considerably.

- Tell him/her so and discuss further avenues for improvement.

Case 2: The employee **has made some progress but his/her performance remains low**.

- Refocus his/her work on the tasks he/she does best. Get the highest-achievers from amongst his/her peers to supervise his/her work. At the same time, consider internal transfer options.

Case 3: Progress is **clearly insufficient**.

- Sanction underperformance clearly: this is important in the eyes of the rest of the team.
- Take the measures in your power to avoid having the rest of the team bear the weight of this underperformance. This may mean parting with this employee, by means of an internal transfer or by asking him/her to leave the company. Otherwise, adjust the objectives, organization or resources so others don't have to make up for these deficiencies over the long term.

HINT

Go over the situation as rigorously as for the first analysis. Based on an observable situation, take another look at the targets fixed and assess the results achieved with your employee.