



5 Things you should know about Performance Management

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1. **How do you know that someone isn't performing?** It's important that you don't just "think" or "feel" that someone isn't performing, as it needs to be based on fact. Facts can be based on not delivering or meeting targets or objectives or facts can be based on feedback with examples of the poor performance from others working in the business or even from external customers.
2. Once you start to either see this poor performance or hear about it from others as noted above, **it's important that you address the issues immediately.** Don't ignore it and hope that it will go away, because unless the person knows that what they are doing is unacceptable, they don't have the opportunity to do anything about it. These are always difficult conversations to have, so make sure you go into the conversation prepared. This may mean that you have to tell the person who the feedback has come from if relevant and you must give examples of the poor performance. So, if it is that they have been rude to a customer, then you need to give the customer's name and the feedback received from that customer. If it's that they have not met a target or an objective or a deadline then be specific about exactly what it is they have failed to achieve.
3. Once you have given them the details about the poor performance, you need to **ask them why they think this has happened and be prepared to listen.** There could be a very plausible reason why the incident has happened, or it could be they tell you that they didn't know of the target or the deadline. Finally, it could be that they have some problems at home at the moment and they are finding it difficult to concentrate on work. Just listen and take notes, using this time to think about what you can do to address the problem. If there are issues which you need to address, then address them, as this will then mean they can perform to the required standards as the excuse has been removed. If the reasons for them not performing are of a more personal nature, ask them what you can do to help and support them through this difficult time. It might be that they need to change their hours for a short period of time or that they need to go to a counselling appointment once a week and have a little time off. What's important here is that you agree a plan that the business can support and in return you expect to see the required improvements.
4. **Put it in writing** – whatever you have discussed and agreed should be written up. This doesn't have to be in a formal letter but an email at least that can be referred to by both parties in the future if necessary.

It's important that this letter reflects accurately what was discussed and agreed. I would suggest that someone such as an HR professional checks this letter/email before it is sent to the individual.

5. It's now your responsibility to keep an eye on things. Have they improved? If so, then that's great. If not, what are you going to do next? Sometimes these informal approaches to performance management can be very successful as they can "nip" minor problems in the bud. However, on occasion a more formal process may be needed where targets and improvement objectives are set, often known as a PIP (Performance Improvement Plan) with agreed deadlines which need to be monitored on a regular basis and documented as part of a formal performance management process. I would suggest that if you get to this stage, you may need the support of an HR professional.

It's a myth that you can't dismiss people for performance, you can, but only if you have followed the right process and have communicated this process clearly to the person and given them the time and support needed to improve. Careful and good record keeping is key to the successful dismissal of an employee for poor performance.

I should point out that it's never plain sailing when dealing with poor performance issues. The reason for this is that you are essentially saying that someone is not performing well in their role, and this can provoke a number of different reactions from people. Some can become very defensive and angry; some can get very emotional, and some can just decide they can't face the process at all and get themselves signed off work by a DR as "unfit for work due to stress." These types of reaction are common because no one likes to hear they are not doing well and fundamentally people want to go to work to do a good job. This is why it's important to have professional help and support throughout this process. An experienced HR professional will have seen and dealt with all of these reactions and will know exactly how best to deal with them to minimise the risks of the process not being followed to a successful conclusion for both parties; either the person improves, or the person is dismissed.

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