

Performance Improvement Plan

Purpose

To provide guidelines for managers to assist employees in raising their performance level to meet acceptable standards, expectations and requirements for their position. This program should be administered when coaching has been unsuccessful.

Guidelines

Managers should have frequent conversations (coaching) with full-time and part-time employees to discuss accomplishments and developmental needs. When managers identify performance deficiencies, they should discuss them with the employee and recommend solutions.

Employees within the 6 months probationary period should be evaluated at 3 months and prior to the end of the 6-month probationary period. Managers should determine the employee's level of progress and discuss with the next level manager.

If an employee's performance falls below the expected level or the new hire is not showing progress to reach the expected level, the manager should have a discussion with the employee, develop a performance improvement plan, if needed, and establish a time frame for correcting the performance deficiency.

Implementation

The following steps provide an approach that may be utilized. These steps are appropriate in most situations. However, special circumstances may alter this process. For example, the first step may be corrective/disciplinary action or the employee may be placed immediately on a performance improvement plan.

Generally, implementations of the steps occur as follows:

- 1) **Counseling Session (Verbal Warning)** - used to discuss the employee's performance deficiency and to ensure the employee understands that a problem exists.

Step 1: Manager discusses with the employee the desired results and a possible solution to correct the problem, as well as identifying what assistance is available, if needed, e.g. training.

Step 2: Manager should explain the performance improvement process and advise future consequences if problem persists. The consequences are performance improvement plan or corrective/disciplinary action. **Note:** Termination could be the next step for New Hires within the 6-month probationary period if problem persists.

Manager documents the session and retains in the department's employee file.

Step 3: If improvement is shown, recognize the achievement and provide positive reinforcement. Counsel employee on consequences of repeated and/or future performance levels below expectations. Advise the employee that the expected level of performance must be sustained otherwise, further corrective/disciplinary action may occur.

Manager documents the session and retains documentation of the session in the department's employee file.

Step 4: If no improvement is shown, proceed with the performance improvement plan or corrective/disciplinary action or termination for new hires within the probationary period. This situation should be discussed with management and Human Resources.

2) **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)** - Used when performance levels have not improved, placing employee's continued employment in jeopardy.

Step 1: Manager develops a memo that summarizes prior discussions (e.g. counseling sessions), clearly identifies the performance problem, and what action (s) must be taken by the employee.

The memo should include the following:

- Deficiencies in the employee's performance (previously noted, but not corrected, as well as any new deficiencies)
- References to prior discussions or memos regarding performance, if any.
- Expectations to assist the employee in attempting to achieve performance that meets expected level for the position

The performance improvement criteria should be defined in objective terms. For example, the employee's performance may be compared to the expected level by using definite measurements such as production and quality standards, or examples of incomplete or late assignments.

Managers may include steps they will take to assist the employee to improve performance.

- Actual dates of the performance improvement plan (PIP) period.

In most situations, a 30-day period should be sufficient to correct the performance deficiency. Longer timeframes, up to 90 days may be considered if, in management's judgment, performance cannot be corrected in 30 days. Performance improvement plans for attendance issues should 90 days. This will

allow sufficient time to address the issue especially when there is a pattern of attendance violations.

- A statement indicating that the performance level is unacceptable. And the performance problem, if not corrected, could result in further corrective/disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Step 2: Prior to administering, manager should discuss and obtain approvals from next level manager and Human Resources.

Step 3: The memo should be discussed with the employee and signed by the employee and manager. If an employee is unwilling to sign the memo, it should be noted on the document with the date of the discussion and witnessed by another supervisor or manager.

Step 4: Provide a copy of the memo to the employee.

Step 5: Place the memo in the employee's departmental file.

While the decision to terminate an employee may be made at the end of the probation period, employees may be terminated at any time during the performance improvement plan period if, in management's judgment, a sustained effort is not made or it is determined that the terms of the plan will not be met.

- 3) **Achieved Performance Improvement** - If, in management's judgment, the employee's performance improves to the expected level.

Step 1: The manager should prepare a memo documenting improvement in performance, and the employee should be advised that the acceptable level of performance must be sustained.

Step 2: Provide a copy of the memo to the employee.

Step 3: Place the memo in the employee's departmental file.

- 4) **Recurrence of Performance Deficiency** - An employee is expected to maintain the expected level of performance.

If the employee again falls below the expected performance level, management may determine whether corrective/disciplinary action is appropriate or to again place the employee in the performance improvement process. This situation should be discussed with senior management and Human Resources.

Performance Improvement Program Administration

Do's

- **Investigate and address** poor performance and/or violations on a timely basis.
- **Remember that your primary objective is to bring the problem to the employee's attention so that the "performance/behavior" can be corrected.** Use conversational style, verbally walk through a review of the history and content of the plan. If your employee believes you have been fair and objective, he/she may not like the outcome, however, he/she is much more likely to accept it.
- **Discuss the employee's performance/behavior privately, away from other employees.** *Do not compare them to other employees.* Focus on the performance/behavior, which can be modified or changed, refrain from "attacking" the employee's personality. This is more likely to result in defensive behavior on the part of your employee. It is better to review the standards/expectations for the job, and explain how they are not meeting them.
- **Make sure the department rules are communicated.** If you don't know the rule, you can be sure your employees do not know the rule. Don't make an example of an employee by writing them up for a rule that has not been clearly communicated. Advise them of the rule *and the consequences*, and then hold them accountable.
- **Ask for the employee's feedback to confirm understanding of the issues.**
- **Determine the guidelines of the performance improvement plan (PIP) and who is to do what and when. Schedule the first follow up meeting.**
- **Ask the employee to review and sign the plan. Give the employee a copy.** If an employee is unwilling to sign the memo, it should be noted on the document with the date of the discussion and witnessed by another supervisor or manager.
- **Keep in mind the Performance Improvement Program is intended to provide guidance to ensure consistent application throughout the organization.** Whenever corrective/disciplinary action is issued it should be done only after a thoughtful review of all the information. Your role as a Manager or Supervisor is critical in ensuring fairness and objectivity. You have the authority to exercise discretion based on your judgment of the situation. However, all information should be reviewed with your next level Manager and Human Resources prior to review with the employee.

Don'ts

- **Race through the history/background of the problem.**
- **Say there is no alternative but to administer a performance improvement plan.** Explain why there is a plan and how it can help redirect the behavior or performance.
- **Just give the document to the employee and tell them to read it.** You may not approve of their behavior, but they still deserve your fairness and objectivity. Once you address the deficiencies and inform them of your expectations, ask them what you can do to help. Then assure the employee that you are confident they can meet

the standard/expectation. Remember to provide positive reinforcement when you see your employee exhibiting the desired behavior.

- **Fail to allow adequate time for questions.** You need to make sure the employee understands exactly what is expected of him/her and what will happen if acceptable performance is not achieved.
- **Focus just on problems; discuss a balance appraisal.** A little positive reinforcement can go a long way.

Performance Improvement Plan Monitoring

Do's

- Look for opportunities to provide positive reinforcement
- Treat the employee as you normally would.
- Meet follow-up commitments as outlined in the plan.

Don'ts

- Ignore the employee
- Hover over the employee
- Make off-hand comments
- Threaten the employee with disciplinary actions.