



5 STEPS TOWARDS BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A quick guide for line managers



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1. IDENTIFY ANY UNDERLYING PROBLEMS	4
2. INVOLVE THE EMPLOYEE	5
3. SET CLEAR OBJECTIVES	6
4. AGREE TRAINING AND SUPPORT	7
5. REVIEW PROGRESS REGULARLY	8
FURTHER READING	9
WHO WE ARE	10

INTRODUCTION

Dealing with poor performance is probably one of the biggest challenges you will face as a manager.

When there's a host of other urgent tasks competing for your attention, it's tempting to brush the problem under the carpet and hope it will go away. There are consequences, however, when walking away from those difficult conversations you'd rather not have. The employee continues to make mistakes, deadlines are missed, clients complain – and other members of the team start to feel resentful about constantly having to pick up the slack and put work right.

One of the best ways to tackle under performance is to sit down with the employee and put together a clear Performance Improvement Plan (or PIP).

So, what should you include in the plan and what's the best way to go about it? This guide will help line managers build more effective PIPs, and get that all-important employee buy-in.



1. IDENTIFY ANY UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

Before you start to put the performance improvement plan together, make sure you are fully aware of any issues which may be behind poor performance.

You may want to consider:

- Is the employee struggling because they haven't been given the training they need to do the job?
- Are colleagues being unpleasant or uncooperative?
- Are there personal or family issues getting in the way of their ability to focus?

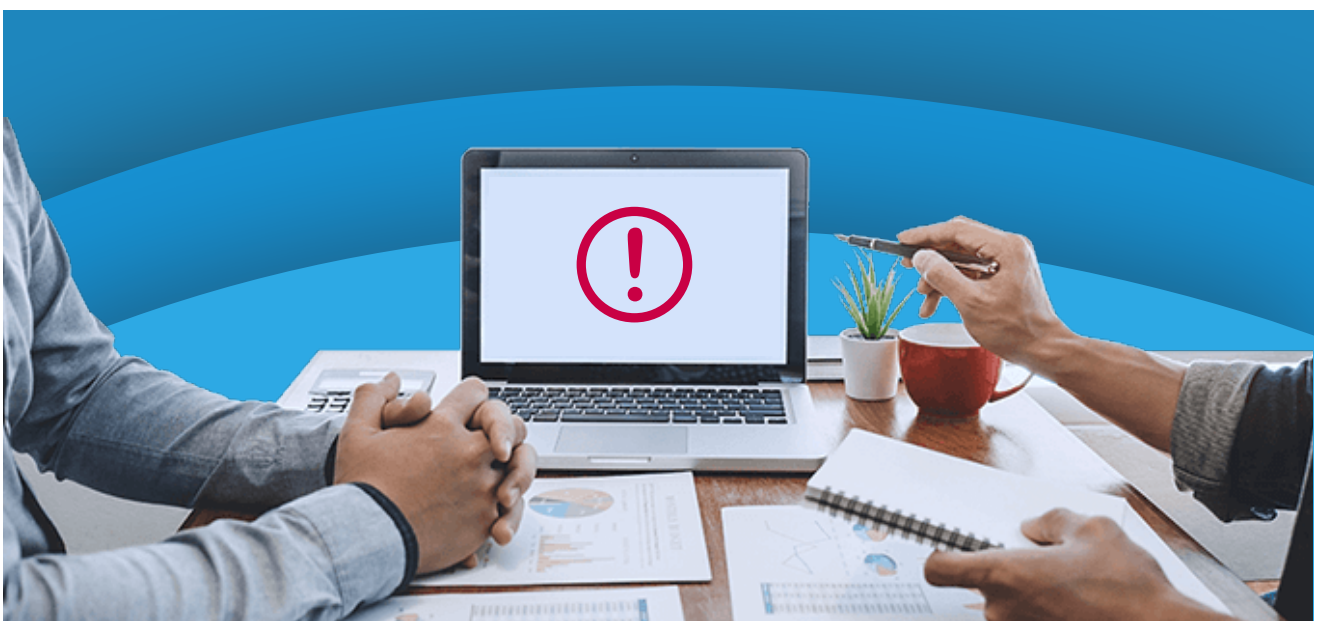
Be aware that employees are not always up-front about any health or [disability issues](#) they may be grappling with for fear they might lose their job.

If you have an HR platform, look back at the history of absences, training and performance reviews.

For example, are there any patterns or trends, such as missed training opportunities, poor performance reviews or increasing level of sick leave that could point to an underlying problem with motivation or work-life balance? Making use of your employee data to identify potential issues before you have the conversation will help you to ask the right questions.

Make sure you have got to the real root of the problem.

If you don't uncover any hidden issues, you won't be able to give the employee the support they need or make any necessary adjustments to their role and nothing is likely to change.



2. INVOLVE THE EMPLOYEE

People are much more likely to buy in enthusiastically to any performance improvement plan if they have played a part in putting it together.

With that in mind, make sure you sit down with the employee - either in-person or virtually -to have a frank discussion about your concerns and what needs to change. Consider the following:

Make it a dialogue not a diatribe.

Give them the opportunity to add their perspective and be open to any ideas they may have about what they need to get their performance to an acceptable level.

Firm but friendly is the tone to aim for during these initial discussions.

People need to be under no illusions about the fact their work or attitude is lacking – but they equally need to feel you have a genuine desire to help them get better and will support them in whatever way necessary.

Think carefully about whether or not to involve HR at this stage.

Having them sit in on the performance conversation may appear heavy-handed and might inhibit an open discussion – but it's always a good idea at this stage to let them know that you are having the conversation, and what it's about, so they can flag up any potential issues.



3. SET CLEAR OBJECTIVES

A set of clear objectives should be at the heart of any performance improvement plan.

The employee needs to be crystal clear about exactly what you want them to do differently, by when, and how this will be reviewed or measured.

Make sure any objectives or targets you set are realistic and to be performed within an appropriate time frame.

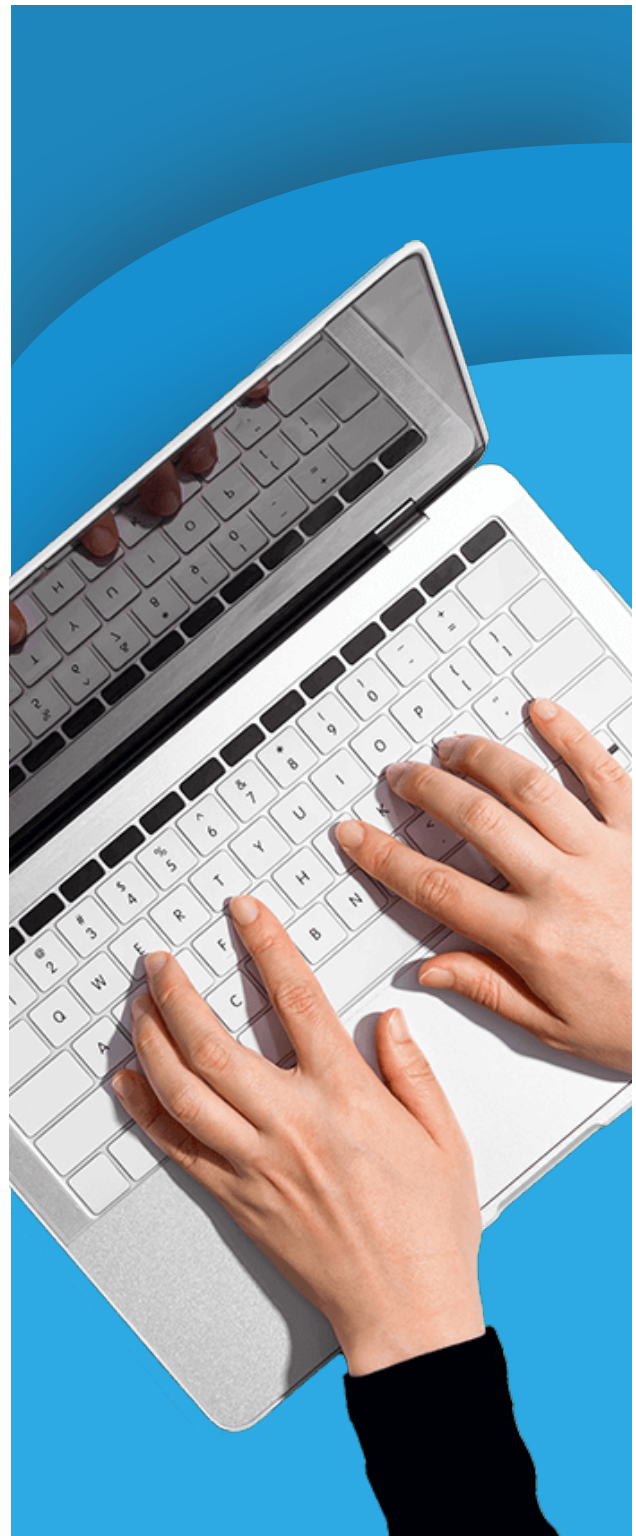
People will feel defeated before they start if what you're asking is so stretching that it seems unachievable.

Take things step-by-step

Look to break down objectives into a series of small steps, and arrange informal check-ins to evaluate progress. This way, people can see themselves making progress and will also have regular opportunities to discuss any issues or obstacles they could be experiencing.

Keep a record of agreed objectives and actions

Should any performance-related issues with an employee escalate, having clear evidence to support your decision making is vital. Using an HRIS platform that includes performance management software can help you keep a record of all discussions and agreed actions - giving you the hard-proof required to backup your actions.



4. AGREE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

You can't call people out for poor workplace performances if you're not helping them develop the necessary skills they need to do their job properly.

Sometimes people have been thrown in at the deep end from day one of their job and have been left to muddle their way through tasks they are not properly equipped to handle. Or, maybe their role has changed and they're now being asked to handle new work or operate in areas they are not familiar with.

In those situations, training and development should be an integral part of the performance improvement plan.

Once you've identified skill or knowledge gaps, you can think about the best way to plug them. This doesn't always have to involve sending people on a formal training course – although there will be times when this is exactly what they need.

For example, job shadowing a colleague can be an effective way to build understanding and capability. Or, you could consider assigning a mentor who could guide the employee on the best way to handle tasks or situations.



5. REVIEW PROGRESS REGULARLY

Set regular dates when you and the employee can sit down to review and document progress. At this stage, record-keeping is essential.

Should performance not improve and you decide, for example, to take disciplinary action, having a clear trail of what was discussed and agreed will be important. This gives the individual a target to work towards and gives you the opportunity to make sure what's been agreed is actually happening and everything is staying on track.

HR management systems that provide online check-ins, make keeping track of conversations really straight-forward, and ensures important documentation doesn't go astray.

In most cases, having clear goals and a plan of action will result in improved performance. People generally want to do a good job and please their manager. But, if nothing has improved, you may need to take things to the next level.

Make sure you're very clear about your company's disciplinary process and the steps you need to follow, and that the employee is also clear you are moving into a formal process.

Seek support from HR and make sure that all relevant policies, processes and notes of meetings are available to everyone involved. This means that everything is visible, there is no room for misunderstandings and should the employee raise a formal grievance, you will be able to demonstrate that you have handled the issue fairly and appropriately.



FURTHER READING

The following articles look at all aspects of effective performance management – why not take a look?

[How to manage difficult conversations: 8 top tips](#)

[Performance management: are your processes fit for purpose?](#)

[Performance reviews: focus on motivation](#)

[What are performance check ins, and what questions should you ask?](#)

[Guide: How to build teams that really work](#)

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