



## HOW TO COACH “PROBLEM” EMPLOYEES A Four-Step Plan for Managers

### Six Common Reasons Managers Give for not Dealing with Problem Employees

1. Let’s give it more time - the employee could turn around on his or her own.
2. If the employee left we’d be short-handed.
3. It’s easier to just cover the deficiency myself.
4. The employee will get upset / mad / defensive – it’s hard to deal with that!
5. It’s been going on so long, and I have no documentation or notes on the issue.
6. I’d have to admit that I made a bad hiring decision.

When faced with a poor-performing or disruptive employee, it’s easy for supervisors to play the wait-and-see game and simply hope the situation will improve. But problems rarely solve themselves. And that’s especially true with problem employees.

In most cases, problem employees left unattended will lead to deteriorating morale, weaker productivity and possibly even legal trouble. Effective supervisors must address such problems head-on.

The best method? Meet with employees right when you spot problem behavior or performance—don’t wait. In your discussion, focus on the following four steps to get the most from the meeting and to protect the organization from employees who may claim they weren’t treated fairly.

#### 1. THE ‘WHAT’

- Precisely pinpoint the problem to the employee.
- Focus on specific task outcomes and/or behaviors.
- Use examples.
- Reference previous conversations.

#### Example:

*“As we’ve discussed before, your tardiness in submitting reports is unacceptable. You know our standard is to submit reports by the first of each month and you have missed that deadline the last three months.”* (Cite specific expectations and examples of poor performance and/or behavior.)

**Another approach:**

*“How do you think things are going with your backlog and deadlines this month? I know you’ve been worried about meeting our department standard.” (Actively listen.) “What do you think the problem is? Why is it happening?”*

**2. THE IMPACT**

- Identify the negative impact (on quality, productivity, service, others, goals, etc.).
- Gain agreement that a problem exists.
- Discuss consequences if the problem continues.

**Example:**

*“When these deadlines are missed, other departments are affected and it impacts our service. For example ...” (Cite specifics.) “Do you agree this is a problem? I am documenting our conversation. Failure to improve will lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination.”*

**Another approach:**

*“What do you think happens when these deadlines are missed? How do you think it impacts service?” (Actively listen.) “I know this is difficult and I have confidence you’ll take care of this, but failure to improve will lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination. Just so you’re aware, I do need to document our conversation.”*

**3. THE ‘HOW’**

- Generate solutions to correct the problem.
- Decide on the best course of action.
- Gain commitment from the employee on his or her role in solving the problem.

**Example:**

*“I have created a turnaround plan for you with steps to make the necessary improvements. First ...” (Describe the plan.) “What can I further clarify? Are you willing to follow this plan?”*

**Another approach:**

*“Let’s brainstorm ideas on what you can do to meet the standard. I’m here to support you in any way I can. I want you to be successful.” (Actively listen, reinforce the employee’s workable ideas, add your own ideas and confirm the plan.) “These are good action steps. Can you summarize them in an e-mail this afternoon?”*

#### 4. THE 'WHEN'

- Establish a follow-up strategy.
- Clearly determine how and when you and the employee will review progress.
- Set specific dates for check-in meetings.
- Recognize improvements as they happen (even small steps).

**Example:**

*"I'll be checking your workload each day to see how you're progressing. Let's also meet every Friday in the conference room at 3 o'clock to review how you're specifically progressing on the plan. Those meetings will also be documented."*

**Another approach:**

*"Let's meet regularly to go over your progress. How frequently do you think is workable?" (Remain open to the employee's suggestions but add your input as necessary.) "Let's go ahead and put that on our calendars."*

*Adapted from: Business Legal Reports*