

- Resist the temptation to play victim, villain or hero roles. Stay on your side of the emotional line and let the other person become his or her own hero in the process.
- **Focus on the conduct, not the person.** Keep “You” out of the conversation. (i.e., “I noticed it is 20 after 9” vs. “You are late again!”)
- **Break the problem down.** Is the non-performance the results of the person’s skill, desire or experience? Are they being asked to do too much? Has the job passed them by? If it is skills or experience, will training or mentoring help? Do they need better orientation or instruction? Do you need to hire and promote better? Are valuable skills being ignored or undervalued? If skills or experience is not the problem, have they lost their desire? If so, have you de-motivated them? Has somebody or something else done so? What “feels unfair” to them? Is it justified?
- **Don’t play psychologist or lawyer.** Unless of course you are one. If you suspect there may be a disability affecting performance or third-party interference (harassment, discrimination, sabotage), be quick to involve HR.
- **Verbal Warning.** “I noticed... Then document specifically. You can speak of how you or others have effectively addressed the issue of concern. (i.e. “I once had a challenge with day care too. I knew that if I came in late one more time I would be fired. Here is what I did.”).
- **Written Warning.** Again, document specifically. Most importantly, get them to “own” their problems and keep those monkeys off your back!
- Create the **Action Plan.** First focus on the **effort** and then the **results**. Coax, encourage and inspire them to stellar performance. Once they have enough confidence as a result of their efforts, then you can discuss results.
- **If they leave would you be relieved or upset?** If you would be relieved and they are still there...why? Can’t replace them, poor documentation, you don’t care anymore, don’t want to be turned into a bad person? What is the added damaged to you, the organization, and to the employee if you keep them on? If you would be upset, consider suspension, transfer, demotion and other alternatives.
- **Get a second opinion.** Nothing is wrong with getting your “head checked.” Perhaps someone has a higher thought or a concern you failed to consider.
- **Terminate with dignity.** Mid-week is preferred. Keep it private and have somebody join you if necessary. Shouldn’t be much to talk about so don’t go for an employee attempt at a “last chance.”
- **Give yourself a break!** Nobody said this isn’t stressful. If necessary, give yourself an hour to take a pleasant walk or to catch up with a business contact. When you are ready, examine what you could have differently or better in managing this employee to avoid similar failures in the future.

# Checklist for Managing Poor Performance

by Don Phin, Esq.

Nothing can be more frustrating than dealing with a poor performer. This checklist was designed to help you do a better job of improving performance, while eliminated unnecessary drama in the process.

- ☐ Come from the **highest place** possible. How would you like to be treated? Even better, how would you like a loved one to be treated? How would somebody you greatly admire, or put your faith in, handle the situation? How can you manage this situation in a way that would make you proud?
- ☐ Remember this: you are responsible **to** other adults, not **for** other adults. The ultimate responsibility of management is to place people in a position where they can succeed. Whether they chose to do so is a decision for them to bear responsibility for. People usually succeed when they are doing things they **can** do well, **like** doing well and have **experience** doing well.
- ☐ Dr. Deming (the father of Total Quality Management) stated that one of the biggest problems management faces is that it tends to recycle ignorance. **Are you clear** about the directives for your position/department/team? Are the instructions and expectations provided to employees well communicated? Or, have you **assumed** they know what their job is and that they would do it **just like you**?
- ☐ Is the job reduced to a **Standard Operating Procedure**? (SOP) Is the system in writing and continually improved? Are there standard benchmarks for performance in terms of quality and quantity?
- ☐ Have **priorities** been defined? Have activities been **scheduled**? Is time being managed well?
- ☐ When an employee does something stupid, or that feels “unfair,” watch your emotional override! **Take a deep breath**, say “Wow, that was interesting!” and keep your emotions out of it. If necessary, go for a walk and come back. **Do not make a bad situation worse!**
- ☐ Deal with it now. **Ignoring, burying, or denying** poor performance will never make it go away. It only enables continued poor performance until it becomes cancerous.
- ☐ Watch your **physical state**. Ask, “Where would you like to talk about...” **Mirror** their physiology and gradually bring it to a positive posture.
- ☐ Acknowledge **your fears**: i.e., maybe you gave inadequate instruction, avoiding confrontation, sabotage, villainization, no support from above, the union, not being seen as a “good person,” and so on. Is the fear real? Isn’t the risk of doing nothing even greater?
- ☐ Acknowledge **their fears**: economic survival, professional reputation, lack of direction, loss of belonging, retaliation, and so on. Is the fear real? Isn’t the risk of continued non-performance even greater?