

BUILDING PERFORMERS

5 Steps to Moving Low Performers Up or Out

By Bud Haney

Every business, despite best efforts in recruiting, hiring, and motivating employees, eventually faces the problem of low performers. Tasks get done but seldom on time. Absenteeism and tardiness creep up. The manager gradually shifts some of the workload to other, higher-performing workers. As the manager, you wish people like this would just disappear, but it seems they never do. They just seem to hang on and on... In some circles this phenomenon is labeled “presenteeism,” and having these low performers at work may be costing you more than if you paid them to stay home! Top performers, saddled with the extra load of carrying dead weight, may simply choose to move on. What can you do, then, to solve this dilemma? Here are five key steps to changing the performance pace in your organization.

1 Identify the problem in clear, measurable terms. If you’ve been meaning to set performance standards for each job in your area, now is the time. Absenteeism, tardiness, missed productivity levels, and timeline delays could all become part of a set of performance standards (although you would be well-advised to set these standards in their more positive polar-opposite verbiage.)

2 Communicate. Meet with your low performers, lay out the expectations and the places where performance regularly falls short, and make clear what the specific expectations are for future performance. Make it clear that these expectations will be tracked and frequently evaluated. Then do just that – make the consequences of failing to meet these goals clear and enforceable. Consider coaching these employees toward improvement. The PXT Coaching Report can help managers communicate with and coach employees.

3 Work your plan. Execution is the key. Follow your scheduled evaluations of performance with clear feedback. If expectations are not being met, give the feedback immediately. While your fondest hope may be to see these people

improve their performance, it’s much more likely that you’re simply documenting the path to the door. Either way, timely feedback, action on promised consequences, and consistent application are your keys to solving the problem.

4 Document your process. One successful manager said, “The most expensive time an employee is on my payroll is the interval between when I decide to fire them and when they go out the door.” Because firing someone, especially someone who has been with the business for a long time, is very painful, you may find yourself procrastinating. Your delay at this stage can only compound the damage. Following Jack Welch’s advice to remove the bottom 10 percent of employees each year is not an easy path, and you may differ in your approach to making your business better, but to ignore a consistently low-performing employee is to ensure that your operations will never be as good as they could be.

5 Take Action. If you’ve followed steps one through four, you’re ready to make the necessary decisions for the good of your company and other employees.

Of course, when it is time to hire a new employee, we would all like to avoid replicating the departed one! This is the opportunity to use a well-structured hiring process, information from assessments, background checks, and other valid information you can gather to add a top performer to your business.

Studies have shown that top performers in nearly any business will out-produce low performers by anywhere from 200 to 900 percent! Imagine the effect on your company if you could replace one low performer with one top performer. Then, imagine what would happen if you did it again and again... The good news: you can! **N**

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