

EMPLOYEE JOB IMPROVEMENT PLANS

This Employee Job Improvement Plan designed by Kielley Management Consultants achieves results because:

- it is simple and understandable
- it keeps supervisors and employees focused on job results

This Employee Job Improvement Plan enables supervisors to:

- manage job performance
- change unacceptable performance to acceptable levels
- bring final conclusions when necessary to persistent unacceptable job performance

Before you begin an Employee Job Improvement Plan, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How do I know performance needs improvement?
 - Complaints from customers or service recipients, other employees or managers
 - Own observations
2. Has the employee been informed of the need for improvement?
 - Why or why not?
 - Is there any fear by the supervisor to talk to the employee?
3. What are the consequences of the current unacceptable performance?
 - Work of others is disrupted
 - Other employees have to cover
 - Increased costs
 - Work is not done
 - Other
4. What are possible reasons for the current unacceptable performance?
 - Who has or should have the control to make changes?
5. Did the employee ever in the past perform acceptably? If yes, what happened?

How to Begin an Employee Job Improvement Plan

- Draft a plan.
- Review the plan with your boss.
- Contact your consultant.
- Meet with your employee and implement the plan.

DRAFTING A PLAN

Step 1 – Describe Categories

Just about all performance that needs improvement can be described by these simple categories listed below. Select one or more.

- Improve timeliness
- Improve quantity
- Improve quality
- Improve interpersonal skills

Use these categories in Column #1 – Major Objective – See Example on next page

DRAFTING A PLAN - Continued

Step 2 – Describe Satisfactory Work

Describe what satisfactory work looks like when it is correct.

- Be specific.
- Be succinct.

Place the description of satisfactory work in column #2 – Desired Performance – See Example on next page

DRAFTING A PLAN - Continued

Step 3 – Describe Current Performance

Describe the Current Performance as either **Satisfactory** or **Not Satisfactory**

When Current Performance is **Not Satisfactory**, describe what performance looks like when it is not correct.

- Be specific.
- Be concise.
- Use examples.

Place the description of Current Performance in column #3 – See Example on next page

DRAFTING A PLAN - Continued

Step 4 – Meet with the Employee

Meet with the Employee - For each Major Objective (column #1), discuss the Desired Performance (column #2), and the Current Performance (column #3). The difference between the **Desired Performance** and the **Current Performance** shows the changes the employee must make

Record a Follow-up Date - This is the date you and the employee will meet again to review performance. It should be set between 1-4 weeks from the current meeting date.

Encourage the Employee to give you a list of obstacles that might prevent accomplishment of the desired performance. Set a due date within a week for the employee to return the list. Discuss the obstacles with the employee no later than the next review session.

Give the employee a copy of the employee Job Improvement Plan

DRAFTING A PLAN - Continued

Step 5 – Follow-Up Meetings

Repeat Steps 3 and 4* until satisfactory performance is achieved, or until your consultant assists you with bringing a final conclusion to the persistent unsatisfactory performance.

*If you find it necessary to make changes in the description of Desired Performance (Column #2) for the next review period, discuss any changes with the employee. Give the employee a written copy of the changes. This may be done on a new improvement plan form. Of course Column #3 would be blank at this time.

Example Problem:

Earl does much training throughout the year. Recently he has become grouchy and sullen. This is evidenced by training session evaluations from participants. He doesn't demonstrate enthusiasm by facial expressions or his body language.

He also demonstrated impatience with comments like, "I wish you would stop arguing and listen." This sort of a curt response is upsetting to class participants who, again, complain about this issue on evaluations.

Lately, Earl uses profanity during training. Class participants have found this to be offensive and embarrassing and also have complained about it on evaluations.

This behavior has to change because we need the customers. This type of behavior discourages participants from wanting to come back for future training.

Reasons Why Supervisors Avoid Problem Job Performance

1. Knowledge that an employee has personal problems and my not wanting to burden him/her with an additional problem about work.
2. A lack of understanding about what is expected from employees on the job. I can't deal with it because I'm unsure of what it is they are supposed to accomplish.
3. An employee has performed badly for so long it isn't worth the time and effort. No one has cared before so why deal with it.
4. An absence of support from superiors in confronting an employee with problem job performance. I'm afraid to take on a problem job performance because I don't know the level of support I will receive.
5. A belief that other employees may think badly about me if I make an employee accountable for unsatisfactory performance. Other employees may believe I am being unfair.
6. The employee's job history indicates satisfactory or better with all of his/her performance evaluations making it difficult to confront him/her with a problem. How do I explain to an employee s/he isn't performing satisfactorily?
7. My superiors might believe I am not a competent supervisor if I acknowledge that employees under my supervision have performance problems. This might have a negative impact on my job.
8. Employees appear to be protecting the unsatisfactory performer making it difficult to establish a lack of performance. If other employees won't help how can I do anything?
9. I am afraid the employee could file a discrimination claim if I confront him/her. This possibility makes me insecure because I don't know how to protect myself.
10. It is difficult for me to confront employees with problem performance. I really don't know how to handle the situation comfortably. The conflict that might be generated would be very uncomfortable for me.
11. I am not familiar with my employer's procedure for confronting problem job performance. This type of an effort consumes a considerable amount of time. I don't have the time to deal with this.

WHY COACH?

(This discussion highlights methods of mentoring employees through coaching)

Learning takes place primarily through experience. When learning experiences are guided by managers then an employee can become more effective more quickly.

An employee who is working at less than the upper reaches of his or her potential is an expensive liability. Managers or project leaders are best placed to upgrade the performance of their team members.

One way of upgrading levels of performance is through training. Training is vital for all employees and particularly effective when dealing with technical and management subjects. Formal training usually takes place off the job. But today's managers need to do more than ensure their employees are sufficiently trained to do their jobs. Managers need to widen the areas of responsibility and expertise of team members. As a manager you are the most able to do this as you are closest to the individual and the circumstances of his or her work.

Coaching is a technique that helps achieve both performance improvement and employee development. It involves little or no time being lost in off-site training programs so it is cost effective.

Although coaching can take time it is a short term investment for a long term gain. As the coached employee becomes more independent and capable, you will have more time to concentrate on your role: planning, keeping an overview of tasks and team, and monitoring the achievement of objectives.

Organizations have a better chance of recruiting and retaining employees if those employees:

- Know where they stand
- know where they stand,
- know what is expected,
- know they are valued,
- are challenged,
- are supported,
- know where they are going,
- are given feedback on progress.

Coaching can play a significant part in the retention process. Staff stays with organizations that encourage their development.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Most people associate coaching with sport. But coaching has a wider role. The difference is that at work the task is usually less physical for both the coach and the player. In other ways coaching activities are similar. In tennis for example, the coach does not hit the ball (do the task) but guides and supports the player.

The tennis coach works on two levels. The most obvious of these is on techniques; how to perform the task. Less obviously, the coach also helps the player maintain a mental state that allows him or her to perform well. If a tennis player is tense and worried he or she is unlikely to succeed. Sometimes different coaches develop different aspects of a player's game.

No matter how competent or successful the tennis player, he or she always has a coach. The point is that no matter how good or effective you or your staff members are, you can always get better.

As a coach you have two roles, the first is to ensure the employee knows how to carry out the task and the second is to give him or her confidence.

Coaching enables people to:

- . perform a new task,
- . improve performance,
- . develop a skill,
- . solve a problem,
- . build confidence.

COACHING STYLE

When coaching you need to consider the management style you adopt. At one end of the spectrum you have the tell approach, and at the other, the questioning approach.

In between "telling" (directive) and "questioning" (non-directive) there are a range of styles available to you, such as consultative.

In coaching you will find that a questioning approach is most effective. A questioning style taps into the employee's experience. In this way learning happens most easily, at the same time building the confidence and capability of the employee.

THE SKILLS OF COACHING

In this section we will look at the key skills that form the coaching session process. They are:

- Listening actively
- Asking questions
- Making suggestions
- Giving feedback

These key skills relate to the coaching structure as follows:

Agree on the Topic	Ask Questions Make Suggestions Give Feedback
Identify the Goals	Ask Questions Make Suggestions
Promote Discovery	Ask Questions Make Suggestions Give Feedback
Set the Parameter	Ask Questions Make Suggestions
Authorize and Empower	Ask Questions Make Suggestions
Recap	Ask Questions
Listening actively occurs in all phases of the structure	

Listening Actively

How do you listen actively?

There are three aspects to active listening:

1. Quietening your own mind.
2. Being non-judgmental.
3. Paraphrasing.

1. Quietening your own mind.

Part of listening actively is in knowing when to be quiet. When someone is working through their own thought processes, it is tempting to interrupt or to finish their sentences. If you do this you will interrupt their train of thought and confuse them. Only if the person is stuck are advice and suggestions appropriate.

Your aim is to allow the employee to work out an "own solution". This will be impossible if you impose your ideas. Quietening your mind means suppressing your natural inclination to interrupt and interfere.

2. Being non-judgmental.

Telling someone they are wrong or that their ideas are inappropriate will destroy confidence and creativity. You need to create an environment in which the employee feels confident to brainstorm ideas, including ones which may be slightly "off the wall".

3. Paraphrasing.

When the employee has made a point replay it to them in your own words. From this they will see that you have been listening and have understood. If you do not understand, ask questions until you do, then paraphrase. Paraphrasing need not happen at the end of each point -- that would be tedious.

Once the employee realizes you are listening it becomes unnecessary to paraphrase so often. A simple "yes" or a nod will suffice. At significant points, as at the end of each phase in the coaching structure or where a discovery is made, paraphrasing reinforces the clarity and direction of the session.

"Let me see if I've got that. The goal for this session is..."

Asking Questions

Asking questions and active listening are the key skills necessary for coaching. There are two main types of questions, OPEN and CLOSED. Closed questions are less useful in coaching because they only promote a "yes" or "no" response.

Open questions promote discovery and stimulate thinking. They are therefore ideal for coaching.

Open questions are ones that start with "what", "where", "when", "how", and "who". Aim to avoid the "why" question which can be seen as aggressive.

There are three specific types of open questions you may find helpful when coaching. They are:

1. Clarifying questions.
2. Creative questions.
3. Process questions.

A clarifying question generates specific information. For instance,

"What specifically does that mean to you?"

A creative question promotes discovery and opens the employee's mind to new possibilities. So for instance,

"How have you seen your colleagues handle similar situations?"

"What would be your approach if there were no budgetary constraints?"

A process question allows you, the coach, to manage the session in terms of structure. For instance,

"What would you like to get from this session?"

or

"What authority do you think you need to complete this stage?"

Although the aim of coaching is to draw out ideas from the staff member you need not feel inhibited about putting forward your own thoughts and ideas. See Making Suggestions .

Giving Feedback

You may need to give feedback from time to time. Feedback is best offered in a non-judgmental way, and offered as an opinion. An employee may need two types of feedback. The first type is if their ideas are off course. The second type is if their method of approach -- behavior -- is inhibiting their ability to succeed.

Feedback should be factual, specific and accurate. It should, wherever possible, be backed up with reference to a particular situation. The way in which you give feedback will determine whether it is accepted and acted upon.

Making Suggestions

A lot of people react negatively to advice or suggestions. Often advice and ideas are rejected because the recipient feels no ownership of them and sees this as threatening or as imposed solutions.

Aim to ensure that your staff member has exhausted his or her own ideas before you volunteer yours. In this way your suggestions will be seen as additional thoughts. You don't always have to have additional ideas. In many cases your employee may come up with all or more options than you would have considered; in which case a word of praise will work wonders.

GETTING STARTED

Coaching is not just about techniques and structure alone, it is about partnership, your partnership with your staff member. If the partnership is missing no amount of technique, however expert will help.

Creating A Partnership

How do you create a coaching partnership?

The chances are that the person you are coaching will be a full-time member of your team or part of a project team working on an audit, a computer installation or an office move. You will be sharing a common goal and can use this bonding to build a partnership.

Your staff member must understand that your intention is to help them learn a new task or skills, or to improve a particular area of their work. Make your intentions clear when you agree the long term goals for the coaching project and gain their commitment and cooperation at that stage.

What can break a partnership is being judgmental. "Rubbish" or "You are useless, I knew this exercise was a mistake" are guaranteed partnership breaking remarks, as is a management style which is oppressive and intolerant of another person's view.

Creating Rapport

During the coaching session itself, there are a number of things that can be done to enhance the sense of partnership.

Seating: Try not to coach over the desk. If at all possible arrange two chairs that are almost but not exactly facing each other.

Body Language: Show you are interested through eye contact and an alert posture. Watch out for your employee's reactions. Is the person comfortable or nervous? As you become more relaxed as a coach you will understand more about your employee from their body language.

Taking Notes: It is often useful to make notes during a session. Make your notes as short as possible, and immediately re-establish eye contact. In this way you won't cause a distraction.