

# Identifying Troubled Employees

*A Supervisor's Tip Sheet*



It is a supervisor's job to ensure that the staff is working up to its capacity. This starts with a manager learning how to determine who needs help and what kind of help is needed.

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## Marginal Performance

If the performance of an employee is marginal, then find out why. Reasons may include confusion about expectation, lack of skills or knowledge, the worker's sense of being overqualified and under-challenged, lack of commitment, confusing goals, incompetent co-workers, or ineffective systems, after identifying the source of discontent, work to resolve the situation. Give positive feedback if work performance improves.

## Personal Problems

An employee's job can suffer because of personal worries. There may be marital problems, difficulties with children or financial problems. Job-related stress can also cause noticeable changes in an employee.

## How To Spot Drug Or Alcohol Problems

Employees abusing drugs or alcohol will eventually do poor work. Some early clues for abuse might include lack of alertness, diminished coordination or impaired judgment and decision-making. Other signs are memory lapses, mood swings, anger, apathy, inability to stay on task, abuse of break times, avoidance of co-workers, absenteeism, tardiness, procrastination, inattention to details and extreme sensitivity to criticism.

## When To Step In

If the employee is not adequately improving marginal performance, appears to be showing signs of drug dependency or is having personal problems that are affecting job performance, then it is time to step in.

Proceed quickly before the problem magnifies. Start with an informal talk about the declining job performance. Give specific examples of changes that

have occurred, such as diminished alertness or increased absenteeism. Don't try to diagnose the problem. Instead, refer the employee to the personnel department or an employee assistance program (EAP). Obtaining help is the employee's choice, but doing inadequate work is not.

If the employee's work fails to improve, seek help from the company's EAP representative or personnel department to start disciplinary action. The staff will help you proceed according to company policy. It is important to be fair and consistent in treating the employee and in accurately documenting important information. Continue to follow up on the problem until there is some resolution.

## When The Employee Seeks Help

Give support to any employee who accepts help. If the employee needs to be gone during work hours, give assurance that the absence will remain confidential. Ask if help is needed with insurance, sick leave or personal leave. Such support is crucial.