

Two Types of Employee Performance Issues

By Paula J. MacLean



There are two types of performance issues and also two reasons that an employee may not perform according to an employer's standards or expectations.

When an employee does not perform one or more specific job duties to the standards of quality and/or efficiency expected by the employer, this is determined to be a performance issue. Performance problems are related to job duties and the tasks required of the employee while at work.

When an employee conducts him/herself in a manner that is inappropriate, unprofessional, or unethical, this is a behavior or conduct issue. Both performance and conduct or behavioral issues require intervention. A supervisor or manager must respond differently to each type of issue.

Bob works for a fast food restaurant. He always arrives at work a few minutes early, is pleasant with his supervisor, gets along with his co-workers and treats customers very well. However, Bob consistently forgets the script he must use when serving a customer. The script includes several "up-sell" points intended to encourage people to buy more or to increase the size of their order. Bob's supervisor Mac, has given Bob feedback three times and has coached Bob by standing beside him while he is serving customers. Bob does fine while being coached, however as soon as he is on his own, he fails to follow the customer service script.

Does Bob have a performance problem or is this a conduct or behavior issue? We don't really have enough information yet to answer this question.

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Reasons for Performance and Conduct/Behavior Issues

An employee may demonstrate performance issues for one of two reasons. First, the employee may lack the skill, training or experience to perform some part of the job properly. Alternatively, they may have the skill or experience required, but may not be motivated or confident enough to do some aspect of the job.

When an employee lacks skill or experience, the supervisor or manager should train, coach, and guide the employee toward better performance. Training may be on-the-job, through formal education or through employer-sponsored workshops and courses.

When an employee lacks motivation, supervisors and managers must first determine the reasons for the low motivation. These reasons can be organizational or personal in nature. Employees are responsible for maintaining their own motivation. However, supervisors' and managers' behavior, physical working conditions and co-worker attitudes can all directly impact employee motivation. An employee may have the skill to do a job but may perform below acceptable levels because they lack confidence.

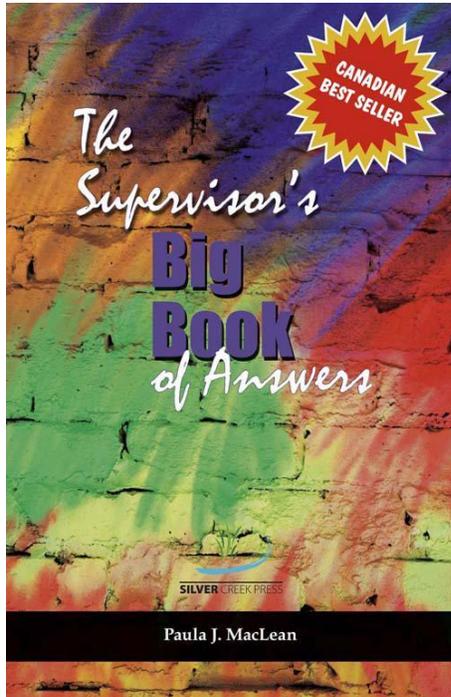
The supervisor must spend time determining how best to support, coach or mentor the employee to improve their performance. This can be a short-term or a long-term process depending on the nature of the work, the personality of the employee and the relationship that they have with the supervisor. Age, gender, level of education, culture and language, and personal history all play a role when deciding how best to approach issues of employee confidence.

Mac decides to meet privately with Bob to dig a little deeper into the problem. Bob says that he feels the customer script is unnecessary and "kind of stupid". He says he prefers to talk to customers without using the script. Mac points out that without the script, Bob "forgets" to up-sell the customer and often forgets to say "Thank you and come again." Bob says that he always tries to up-sell and that he always says thanks.

Now reconsider, does Bob have a performance problem or a conduct or behavior issue? We now know that this is a very likely a conduct/behavior issue. Bob is capable of doing the job properly and does fine while his supervisor is standing beside him. Bob is choosing not to do the job according to the standards required of all employees. Knowing this, more training is not the answer. Mac has given Bob feedback three times already, so more feedback is also not likely going to be successful. Using a verbal warning (the first step of formal progressive discipline) is best next intervention. Bob needs to get the message clearly that he must meet the employer's expectations and use the customer service script immediately and for the long term.

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