

STATIONARY EMPLOYEE OR NOT? How to determine if it's time to move along



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SOME EMPLOYEES JUST WON'T BUDGE. YOU TRY YOUR BEST TO HELP THEM IMPROVE, BUT THEY SIMPLY WON'T MOVE. THE QUESTION IS: ARE THEY PERMANENTLY STUCK? THE BEST SUPERVISORS WANT TO ENSURE EMPLOYEES HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE BEFORE MOVING THEM ALONG. BUT HOW CAN YOU BE SURE?

Take some comfort that there is no precise moment to know when it's time to let a poor performer go. Some managers will jump to let someone go before he or she has a chance to improve; some will exhaust every probable (and improbable) action to try to bring the person up to par; and others will leave a nonperformer in place for so long that the virus spreads to other employees. Reflecting on these six questions will help you decide:

1. Have I been clear in my expectations, standards and measurements (ESMs™) so the employee knows exactly what good performance is and how it is measured? It is important to verify understanding by hearing the employee confirm this instead of assuming comprehension.

2. Has the employee performed well before? If so, then he *can* do the work. He has the knowledge, skills and abilities; however, something has stopped him from wanting—or being able—to do it now. It could be a motivation issue (internal or external), or a system or tool may have changed to impede his work. If the work has *not* been performed well before, training may be needed.

3. Does the employee agree she is not doing

well? One must have the desire to change. People must see a need to change by either seeing a negative consequence of not changing or a positive consequence of changing. Ask the employee how she sees her performance and compare it to your viewpoint. If she firmly thinks her work is outstanding, then it's probably time to say goodbye.

4. Do the employee's talents and interests fit the job? Perhaps the real problem is improper placement. For example, you may have an unmotivated accountant because he took accounting in school just so his job would pay the bills; however, his innate talents and interests are in filmmaking. When performance is an issue, it may be due to internal motivation pulling the employee in another direction.

5. What does someone else think? Having another opinion about the employee from a qualified outsider can help put a different spin on the situation. Gather your coach or advisory group and analyze the conditions before you make your decision. Be open to suggestions on how you could have been, and can be, a better boss.

6. Is termination legal? In assessing the legality of termination, ask yourself if you gave the employee the necessary support, resources and time to correct poor performance and whether you are applying expectations, standards and consequences uniformly among all staff. Finally, be sure you put the justification in writing.

It's never easy to terminate someone's employment, and there may be shades of gray in some situations. However, using these questions to help guide you can make it better for all concerned. ■