

THE DISCIPLINE & GRIEVANCE POCKETBOOK

By Ruth Sangale

Drawings by Phil Hailstone










“This book offers sound advice, clear solutions and practical step by step instructions for dealing with inevitable employee issues. A must-have book for any business that employs people.”

Tamsen Garrie, Network Director, 4Networking Ltd

“Really captures the essential issues around discipline and grievance and guides the reader in such a way as to keep the actions very practical. The case studies are a great addition and demonstrate how the processes work in practice. A must for all managers of people!”

Louise Punter, Chief Executive, Surrey Chamber of Commerce

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HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

THREE BEHAVIOURS



Whatever the cause, when staff are unhappy, demotivated, or out of their depth, it can often manifest itself in three typical behaviours:

1. Poor performance
2. Poor attendance
3. Poor relationships & attitude

These need prompt attention to avoid further problems. Let's look at how you deal with each of these issues.



HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR PERFORMANCE



Start by clarifying what **good** performance looks like in your organisation and it becomes easier and fairer to identify **poor** performance. Three ingredients are necessary in order for your employees to perform in the way you expect:

- A clear set of responsibilities and standard of performance described in terms of output, targets and other tangible results
- Clear objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound (SMART)
- Regular reviews to discuss whether or not they are meeting this standard

HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR PERFORMANCE



If you have identified that an employee is performing poorly, you need to establish whether it is because of lack of commitment or lack of ability.

'I will not' is evident if the employee has performed satisfactorily in the past and is therefore capable of doing the work, but something has made them change, eg the arrival of a new manager.

'I cannot' is when the individual does not have the skills through lack of training or capability.

Each one needs to be addressed differently.



HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR PERFORMANCE – CANNOT



If the issue is of capability ('I cannot') there are four steps to follow:

1. **Review:** identify the key areas where the person is under-performing; be specific with examples.
2. **Reason:** clarify why, and what support and training are required.
3. **Agree:** set a time to provide this support, clarify expected improvements and monitor regularly.
4. **Consequences:** if performance has still not improved after these actions have been taken, consider redeployment to another role.

All the above steps should be in the form of joint discussions at meetings with written confirmation of what has been agreed.

HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR PERFORMANCE – CANNOT



Case Study

A to Z Security provides security staff to different customers around the country. They received a written complaint from a customer about one of their staff, Jaya, finding fault with certain aspects of her performance. A to Z made some enquiries to find out exactly where the problems lay. It turned out that Jaya was not assertive enough in dealing with the public and could not use the security equipment properly, even after training.



HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR PERFORMANCE – CANNOT



Case Study

Jaya's line manager invited her to a meeting, indicating that there was a problem with her performance. When they met:

1. They went through the areas where she was under-performing.
2. Her manager asked her for explanations. It turned out Jaya had received very little training on the system and didn't feel confident dealing with the public.
3. They agreed that training would be organised to address both aspects and that they would have a review meeting in a month's time.
4. After a month, Jaya's performance had improved significantly so she was able to continue in her role.
5. Had she not improved, the manager would then have had to invite her to a formal meeting to find out why, and agree any further support. At this point it would also be made clear that lack of further improvement could lead to dismissal on the grounds of capability.

HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR PERFORMANCE – WILL NOT



If the issue is of commitment ('I will not') it is less straightforward.

There could be several reasons why someone is not committed to performing to a higher standard. You need to try to find out what is behind this. If the person will not co-operate and you are unable to get to the bottom of the reasons for poor performance, you can address lack of commitment in the same way as capability.

If there is no improvement after you have been through all the four steps, then the disciplinary process can be used to handle poor performance. We look at this in more detail later in the book.

HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS



POOR ATTENDANCE

As before, first you need to be clear what constitutes poor attendance, so that it is easy to spot and you can then apply a consistent standard. A good method is to establish the average absence rate for the company and use that as the standard.

FORMULA – Take the total number of days' sickness absence in 12 months and divide it by the number of employees to get the average number of days' absence per employee.

EXAMPLE

Number of staff	= 100
Total number of days off in 12 months	= 300
Average number of days per person	= $\frac{300}{100}$
	<u>3 days</u>

So if, on average, employees are absent for three days a year then anything more than that could be considered poor attendance and trigger a more formal procedure for managing the absence.

HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS

POOR ATTENDANCE



Key reasons for poor attendance are:

1. Genuine ill health – physical or stress-related.
2. Lack of motivation – no longer interested, perhaps because of poor relationships at work, low pay, or personal problems.



HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS



POOR ATTENDANCE

If the reason for the poor attendance is ill health, you can follow the five step procedure, as described below:

1. **Meet** – to carry out an investigatory meeting, highlighting the number of days of absence and the reasons behind them.
2. **Report** – gain access to a medical report. Never try to guess about a medical condition; let the professionals inform you.
3. **Adjust** – meet again, when you have the medical report and discuss and agree adjustments to the role and work environment as required – these are normally recommendations from the doctor or the individual.
4. **Monitor** – monitor closely to see if there is an improvement and agree a date to review the situation.
5. **Seek specialist help** – use an occupational health specialist if necessary.

Managing genuine ill health can be difficult and more details can be found in the *Absence Management Pocketbook*.

HANDLING TYPICAL STAFF PROBLEMS



POOR ATTENDANCE

If you have established that the poor attendance is not because of ill health, but relates to lack of motivation, then you can use the disciplinary process to address it. Before you do this, however, give the individual the opportunity to improve by doing the following:

- **Review** – meet with them and go through their absence record
- **Reason** – find out why they have more absence than average
- **Agree** – set a new standard going forward and monitor it for 3-6 months
- **Consequences** – indicate that lack of improvement will lead to disciplinary action

About the Author

Ruth Sangale BSc MCIPD

Ruth runs her own HR outsourcing service, The HR Dept Ltd. She has over 15 years' HR experience in a range of industries in both large and SME organisations. Ruth has worked at senior level as an HR generalist gaining a wealth of knowledge and experience in recruitment, employee relations, change management, HR policy and training. Ruth is passionate about enabling people to get the most out of their work. She believes that providing employers with support, information and guidance to get the best out of their staff, can contribute to a company's continued success.

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