



Guidelines for Implementing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

STEP ONE – BE POSITIVE

It is important to set a positive tone throughout any discussions with the employee by reiterating that your overall goals for the PIP are to enable the employee to maintain his/her job by improving their performance to meet the required standards for the position.

STEP TWO – COMMUNICATE: OPEN A DIALOGUE

Sometimes, it's not clear why an employee is experiencing poor job performance. Before finalizing a PIP, speak with the employee to explore the reasons for the poor performance (e.g., lack of training, misunderstandings about position expectations, or any unforeseen roadblocks that the employee may be experiencing).

STEP THREE - DOCUMENT

The importance of documentation cannot be stressed enough. Your PIP's success may hinge on the availability and quality of your documentation of the employee's performance problems during a recent measurable period of time. Provide specific examples to clarify the severity or pattern of performance concerns.

Be as specific and constructive as possible; avoid general statements. For example, instead of saying "Employee lacks accountability and follow-through," you might say, "Employee did not provide timely updates on the _____ project." Consider giving specific examples about problems that they ran into during an assignment and why they were problematic (e.g., "When you don't arrive to project meetings on time, it inconveniences other staff members and make meetings less productive.")

STEP FOUR - DEVELOP AN IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

Set realistic, measurable, achievable time-bound objectives for the employee.

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Be clear about objectives - give full descriptions of what is to be accomplished, list names, and define key terms. For example: instead of “must report to the team,” consider listing the specific names of people on ‘the team’.

Be as clear as possible with goals - “During March and April of 2015, Joe must produce at least 150 samples per month” or “During this 90-day performance evaluation, Andrea must provide a weekly report of outreach efforts to her supervisor, Ms. Smith, each Friday at 9 am. The report must include the name of the organization contacted, the name of the organization contact, the date and time the organization was contacted, the type of contact (email, telephone call, voicemail message), and whether the organization agreed to participate in the survey.”

Objectives must be achievable. Keep goals fair and in-line with what is currently expected for other employees performing the same job.

Determine whether the employee may need additional resources or training in order to meet these objectives, identify those resources/training, and plan how management will provide any such resources to achieve these goals.

STEP FIVE - REVIEW PERFORMANCE PLAN

Prior to meeting with the employee, seek assistance from Human Resources or legal counsel to review the written PIP. A second pair of eyes can help to ensure the PIP is understandable, relevant, and attainable within the timeline.

STEP SIX - MEET WITH THE EMPLOYEE

During the meeting, clearly articulate the specific areas for improvement and the plan of action. Be prepared to modify the action plan after receiving input/feedback from the employee. Make any necessary amendments to the PIP and have both the supervisor and the employee sign the PIP.

STEP SEVEN – FOLLOW UP

The supervisor should establish - and follow - a schedule for follow-up meetings to discuss and document progress toward meeting the objectives in the PIP and to allow an opportunity for the employee to ask questions and/or seek guidance/clarification about expectations.

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Be sure to take notes about what improvement or lack of progress has been made. If the employee is not delivering, it is helpful to have specific examples as well as the employee's explanation (or lack of explanation) for their failure to meet the goals/objectives.

CONCLUSION

When the employee responds positively and meets the PIP's objectives, the PIP should be closed, and the employee should be allowed to continue employment. This should be treated as a positive event for the employee, with the message that continued good performance is expected going forward.

If the employee is showing some improvement and is trying their best at meeting the objectives, the supervisor may choose to extend the time period for the PIP if the supervisor believes the employee may be successful if given additional time.

If the employee is unwilling or unable to improve under the PIP, or if things worsen, then the PIP should be closed, and the employee is terminated.

In some cases, the employer may choose to end the PIP before completing the performance improvement period. For this reason, it is especially important that the PIP contains language clearly stating the employer will be evaluating performance throughout the performance improvement period and may take earlier action if warranted. The potential risk of a legal claim may increase, however, if earlier action is taken. For that reason, we recommend review with legal counsel prior to taking employment action.