



MANAGEMENT
FUNDAMENTALS

INTRODUCTION TO MANAGING UNDERPERFORMANCE

A step-by-step guide for managers



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Before You Start

Take some time to familiarize yourself with the contents, then keep it close by for easy reference. Keep an eye out for these icons throughout the document as they are meant to focus your attention on important steps and actions:



REMEMBER

Important reminders and key information to keep in mind



HR SUPPORT

A prompt in the step which may signal a need to reach out to an HR Representative and/or another UBC contact/office



PRO TIP

Actions that managers can take to go the extra mile and apply a leadership competency



LABOUR LAW ALERT

Note: Certain links require CWL access for information in the Managers/Admin section of the HR website. If redirected to a different landing page after logging in, simply click the original link again for direct access.

INTRODUCTION TO MANAGING UNDERPERFORMANCE: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

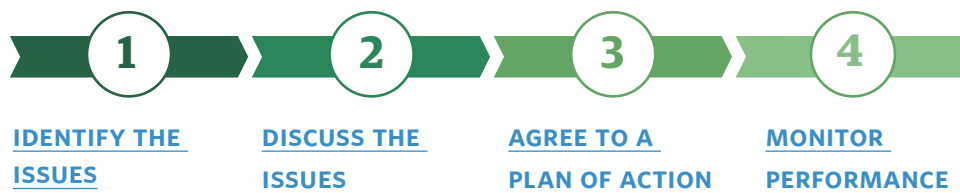
Step-by-Step Process — Why does it matter?

As a manager, you will inevitably encounter situations where your direct reports might not be meeting the expectations of their role. Addressing this issue as soon as possible and understanding your team member's circumstances provides them with the opportunity to succeed in their work and enable change. Managing underperformance can put performance back on track, which can also positively impact the work of the whole team and increase engagement.

Not all underperformance will need a formal approach. Often, an informal discussion is all that is needed to improve performance. What matters the most is that any concerns are addressed early through conversations that are honest, open, and clear.

Overview of the process

When addressing underperformance, it can be helpful to have a structure or guidelines to frame your approach. Follow these steps in order to manage underperformance:



HR SUPPORT

If you have any questions about the process or any concerns about an employee during their [probationary period](#), please contact an [HR Representative](#) for support.



STEP ONE: IDENTIFY THE ISSUES

The first step to address underperformance is to clearly and objectively identify if there are performance issues.



Unsure if it is a performance issue?

Ask yourself:

- What is the expected standard?
- How is the employee falling short?
- What is the desired outcome?
- Have I been clear about the expectations of the role?
- How wide is the gap between what is expected of the role and what is being done by the employee?
- Has the employee been provided with adequate training? Would some additional training be helpful?
- Are there external factors causing the underperformance? (e.g., systems and processes)
- Has the employee been able to perform to required standards in the past? What has changed?



STEP ONE: IDENTIFY THE ISSUES

»»» Examples of underperformance

Take a look at the following examples that show how an employee could be underperforming:



NOT FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS



NOT COMPLETING DUTIES



NEGATIVE ATTITUDE



**POOR JUDGEMENT /
DECISION-MAKING**



REPETITIVE ERRORS



NOT MEETING DEADLINES



**INTERPERSONAL CHALLENGES
WITH COLLEAGUES**

PRO TIP

ACTIVATE YOUR INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY



INCLUSIVE
LEADERSHIP

Activate your [Inclusive Leadership Competency](#) by using facts and evidence to identify the performance issue and avoid unconscious bias. Evaluate performance in good faith and without pre-judgement.

STEP TWO: MEET WITH YOUR TEAM MEMBER TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES

Schedule a conversation to share your concerns, actively listen to your staff, discuss the performance issue, and uncover potential causes. The conversation should be oriented to discuss what is happening and why the issue is present. Make sure you try to understand your employee's perspective.

Prepare for the conversation

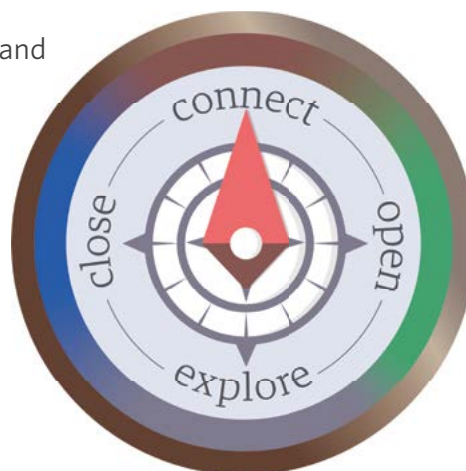
Make sure you schedule enough time for the conversation, consider what you would like to achieve, practice what you will say, and how you will do so. What matters most is that the conversation is **factual and objective, timely, and that it clarifies the performance standards and expectations.**

During the conversation

COEC Model for better conversations

1. CONNECT

Make sure you ask how your employee is doing and extend genuine care.



2. OPEN

Share the agenda. State issues clearly and honestly. Explain why it's important and use examples.

4. CLOSE

Confirm actions, your commitments as well as your employee's commitments, and plan next steps.

3. EXPLORE

Listen to your employee's perspective and understand the cause of the issue.

STEP TWO: MEET WITH YOUR TEAM MEMBER TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES



What could be causing the issue?

CAPABILITY

“I want to but I can’t meet the requirements of the role”

Issues resulting from capability, often referred to as **non-culpable**, may occur for a variety of reasons. Your employee may not have the necessary knowledge/ability, or there might be other factors at play.

CONDUCT

“I can, but I won’t meet the requirements of the role”

When an employee is capable, but chooses to not to perform as required, it is often referred to as **culpable** behavior. It’s important to try to identify the underlying cause of underperformance before assuming it’s a matter of conduct. **If you believe negative behavior is a conduct issue (culpable), contact your [HR Representative](#) for next steps.**

PRO TIP

ACTIVATE YOUR CARING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY



CARING
LEADERSHIP

Activate your [Caring Leadership Competency](#) and try to identify the underlying cause of underperformance, before assuming it is a matter of conduct.

Additionally, make sure you ask your employees if they require any support and create a psychologically safe space to address underperformance issues.

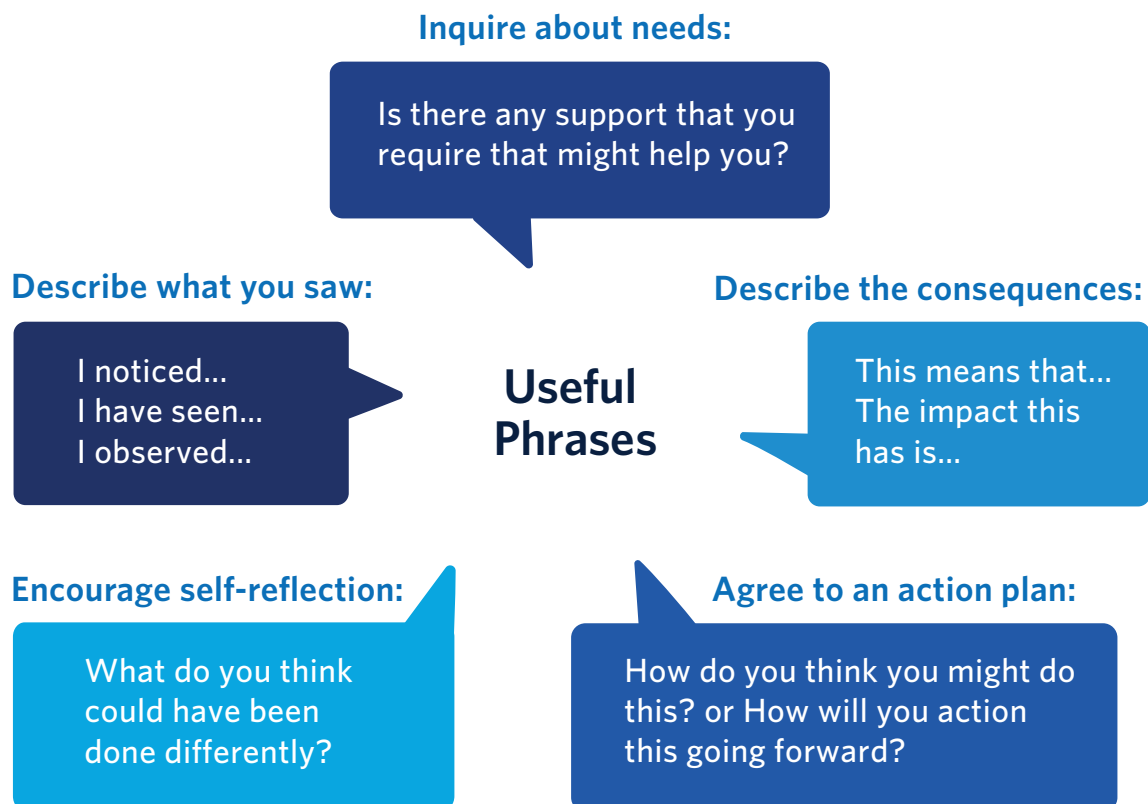
STEP TWO: MEET WITH YOUR TEAM MEMBER TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES



Giving constructive feedback

All feedback should be constructive. The purpose of feedback is to reinforce good practice or behaviour, or to highlight where improvements or changes are needed.

- **Focus on the facts** and what you have observed
- Provide feedback **as soon as possible**
- Make your **feedback straightforward**
- **Clarify performance standards** and expectations
- Guide the employee to **think about what they could do differently**



STEP THREE: AGREE TO A PLAN OF ACTION

Identify next steps to correct underperformance. Depending on the circumstances, steps could include establishing clear expectations, goals, timelines, a period of increased supervision or an accommodation in case of disability. **Employees should always know where their performance stands with respect to job standards and expectations.**



Co-create an action plan

After you have identified next steps, **co-create and document** an action plan that states:

- Clear and specific performance expectations and outcomes
- Activities the employee and you will be taking to reach expectations
- A reasonable timeline to observe improvement in the performance
- Resources available to the employee
- Multiple check points to follow up



Download useful resources

The sample communication below is to support your considerations when developing communications to your employee. Please adapt accordingly to the specific circumstances and contact your HR Representative if more support is required.

1. [A sample message for follow-up on Performance, Summary, and action plan for the employee.](#)



HR SUPPORT

In some cases next steps could mean progressive discipline, up to and including termination. However, it is critical to partner with your [HR Representative](#) if this is considered.



REMEMBER

Bear in mind that your notes may be viewed by others, including your employee, in certain circumstances such as a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) request. Write your notes as if you would be sharing them with your employee. Make factual notes of any feedback provided to your employee and their response.

For some employees who are part of a [union](#), they may have the right to union representation at some/all performance meetings.



STEP THREE: AGREE TO A PLAN OF ACTION



Examples of how to address common causes of underperformance

COMMON CAUSES

SAMPLE NEXT STEPS

Lack of training



Provide training by assigning a “work buddy”; seek feedback from employee and have regular meetings to check in on progress. UBC employees have access to different professional development opportunities. [Explore workplace learning, training, and professional development opportunities.](#)

Behavioural Issues



Discuss the behaviour you are observing and its impact on work. Be curious to understand what is causing the actions. The behaviour may be culpable or non-culpable performance.

Health issues



If you suspect a health issue may be contributing to underperformance, please contact your [HR representative](#). Other supports available include [UBC Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#), the [Centre for Workplace Accessibility](#), and the [Stay at Work/Return to Work program](#).

Need to develop skills



Create a learning & development plan to support upskilling needs, and regularly meet to discuss progress and ability to meet the requirements of the role.

As there may be other causes impacting performance, please ensure the following are also considered:

- Assess if there are equipment issues
- Review whether adequate performance feedback or supervision was provided
- Explore if there are misunderstandings with job requirements
- Identify any workflow issues
- Assess if there are conflicting deadlines
- Determine if there are personal circumstances occurring outside of work

STEP FOUR: MONITOR PERFORMANCE



How to monitor performance

Monitoring performance is a critical aspect of effective performance management. If your employee is meeting some, but not all the requirements of the action plan, it is important to:

- Share your observations and provide feedback in your follow-up meeting
- Express the positive improvements
- Identify the behaviours/actions that are not successfully meeting the action plan
- Explore in more detail what is preventing the employee from achieving the action plan
- Consider if it is appropriate to extend the timeline for the employee to make the necessary improvements. Think about what is reasonable in the circumstances
- Provide feedback in a consistent and timely manner and continue to document these discussions

In many cases, you will need to schedule more than one follow-up meeting with your employee. Performance management is a process of ongoing support and feedback rather than just a single event.

There may be occasions where the four-step model does not improve the employee's performance. If for some reason, your employee cannot meet job requirements despite their best efforts, [please contact your HR Representative](#) to discuss next steps.



REMEMBER

This process can feel stressful for your employee. Remember to check in with them and share useful resources, such as the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#).

Supports are also available for you as a manager. Contact your [HR Representative](#), use the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) or access professional development opportunities through [LinkedIn Learning](#).





KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROBATIONARY STAFF

The probationary, or orientation/trial period (depending on the collective agreement) is for you and your employee to determine whether the job is the right fit. This period provides you with the opportunity to discuss and agree on the expectations of the role, have regular feedback conversations, and note any development needs necessary. **Address performance issues immediately for probationary employees or employees in an orientation/trial period. This time period is critical for immediate action and communication with the employee, and, if applicable, with union representation.**

After meeting with your employee, you may be determining that the role is not suitable for them and considering termination of your employee during the probationary/trial period. It is key for you to be discussing these steps early and regularly with your HR representative and reach out for additional support.

Consider the following:



Make sure you check the processes for managing the probationary period provided by the language in the applicable collective agreement or handbook.



In meetings, clearly outline expected improvements, timelines, and give examples. Consult with an HR representative to check if a union representative needs to attend.



Encourage two or more reviews during the probationary period.



If you're concerned that your employee might not be able to meet performance requirements for the position, reach out to your HR Representative as soon as possible.



Address performance issues immediately.



A union representative might be required to attend some or all of the meetings held with the employee. Please check with an HR Representative for more details.



Allow enough time for appropriate evaluation and the opportunity for employee to demonstrate improved performance.



If you are considering an extension of the probationary period, consult with your HR representative as they will have to communicate directly with the union.



HR SUPPORT

If you have concerns about performance of your employee during their probationary, evaluation or trial period, you will need to address it immediately to explore, support, and develop a plan of action. Contact your [HR Representative](#) for ongoing support.



LABOUR LAW ALERT



If your employee is in a probationary period, UBC may determine to dismiss an employee for reasons such as the suitability and the ability of the employee to meet future work requirements. The concept of progressive discipline does not apply during this time, meaning that any misconduct during the probationary period may be grounds for termination regardless of severity.

You may determine that the role is not suitable for them and are considering the termination of their employment during the probationary period. It is key for you to be discussing these steps early and regularly with your HR representative and reach out for additional support.



It is critical that the employer evaluates their performance in good faith and without bias or prejudice.

- Make sure you check processes provided by the language of the [collective agreement of your employee's labour group](#).
- If you are considering an extension of the probationary period, consult with your [HR Representative](#) for next steps. Your HR Representative will determine if union representation is required.



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To reach an HR Representative, [contact us](#)
or visit us at hr.ubc.ca