

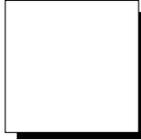


# **Resolving Employee Performance Issues**

Participant Guide



National Park Service TEL Training  
December 16, 2009



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# Welcome

## How to Interact with the Instructor

If you were physically in the classroom with the instructor, you would raise your hand to let her/him know you had a question or comment. Then you would wait for the instructor to recognize you and ask for your question. We are all familiar with that "protocol" for asking questions or making comments.

With TELNPS courses there is also a "protocol" to follow to ensure that you can easily ask questions and others can participate as well. It may seem a little strange at first asking a question of a TV monitor. Remember, it is the instructor you are interacting with and not the monitor. As you ask more questions and participate in more TELNPS courses, you will soon be focusing only on the content of your question and not the equipment you are using to ask it.

As part of the TEL station equipment at your location, there are several push-to-talk microphones. Depending on the number of students at your location, you may have one directly in front of you or you may be sharing one with other students at your table.

When you have a question, press and hold down the push-to-talk button, maintaining a distance of 12-18 inches, wait a second and then ask your question or make your comment. It would sound something like this:

Excuse me [instructor's first name], this is [your first name] at [your location]. I have a question (or I have a comment)."

Then release the push-to-talk button. This is important because until you release the button, you will not be able to hear the instructor.

The instructor will acknowledge you and then ask for your question or comment. Stating your name and location not only helps the instructor, but also helps other students who are



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# Course Overview & Learning Objectives

## Course Overview

Managing employee performance can be one of the most difficult tasks a supervisor must perform because there is so much at stake ... not only are you responsible for getting the most from each of your employees, you also don't want to turn your good employees into poor ones by failing to address their peers' performance issues. Today's course is designed to help you resolve employee performance issues at the earliest stages, with the least amount of complexity, helping to ensure that your employees are productive and that you are satisfied with their performance.

## Target Audience

Any NPS employee with supervisory responsibilities, or who serves as an advisor to supervisors, such as an HR Specialist. This course has been approved to count towards the mandated NPS annual 40-hour supervisory training requirement.

## Learning Objectives:

At the end of this course, participants will be able to--

1. List 3 reasons why it is important for supervisors to deal with employee performance problems in the workplace.
2. Explain the difference between an employee performance issue and an employee conduct issue.
3. List informal methods for resolving performance issues that you can use before implementing the formal procedure.
4. Describe the supervisor's role and responsibilities in resolving employee performance issues.



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# Exercise: Why Correct Employee Problems?



You have 3 minutes to complete this activity

*At your site...*

Why do YOU think it is important for supervisors to deal with employee problems in the workplace?

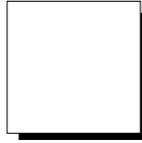
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Jot down a couple of ideas and be ready to share them with the rest of the class.



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# Causes of Poor Performance

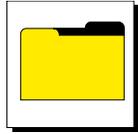
## EMPLOYEE BASED CAUSES

Lack of ability	Lack of effort
Lack of attention	Lack of basic knowledge
Lack of skill	Lack of judgment
Problems not work-related	Substance abuse

## ORGANIZATION BASED CAUSES

- Lack of communication on performance expectations
- Lack of performance feedback
- Failure to provide necessary training or instruction
- Failure to provide necessary information
- Failure to provide necessary tools or other resources
- Failure to provide a reasonable accommodation that would permit the employee to perform satisfactorily such as a health condition or physical or mental problem
- Unrealistic performance expectations
- Harassment or otherwise hostile work environment

- ? **True or False:** Dealing with poor performance can be time consuming.
- ? **True or False:** My time is better spent supervising my productive employees.
- ? **True or False:** If I take action against one employee, it will lower morale among other employees and create a less productive work environment.
- ? **True or False:** Advising an employee that they are not performing satisfactorily is unpleasant and requires special human relations skills.
- ? **True or False:** The procedural steps involved in addressing poor performance are complex and highly technical.
- ? **True or False:** If I do take formal performance-based action, it is likely to be appealed and ultimately overturned.



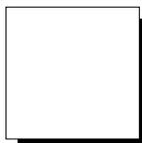
# Case Study: Tom, the Visitor Use Assistant

Throughout today's course, we will be analyzing a hypothetical employee case involving a Visitor Use Assistant that you supervise.

Three months ago you were assigned to Wonderful National Park as a Supervisory Visitor Assistant. In your new job, you supervise 6 permanent employees, along with 6 seasonals; one of them is Tom. Tom is a permanent employee who has been in his current position for 18 months; his first permanent appointment. During the last 3 months, you have seen that Tom consistently has problems balancing his cash drawer; and you have observed that he sometimes demonstrates a confrontational attitude with visitors. Additionally, you have received one complaint letter from a visitor that he treated them in a rude manner during this 3-month time period. In talking to Tom's previous supervisor, you find out that Tom was considered to be a marginal employee but that there was nothing done to counsel Tom or document the problem.

2 elements of Tom's performance plan can be found in Appendix A of this participant guide.

As we go through our course, we will take a closer look at Tom's issues and work through some actions that you can take as his supervisor to correct the situation.



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# Performance vs. Conduct

How do you know which course of action to take? The first thing you must do is to determine whether the issue is one of performance or conduct.

A conduct problem is :

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A performance problem is:

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## Exercise: Performance *or* Conduct?



You have 4 minutes to complete this activity

*At your site...*

Let's look at Tom's issues – there are 2 of them - he is having problems balancing his cash drawer and he has a confrontational attitude with visitors. During the last 3 months, the error rate on his daily shift reports has been 23%. Also during this time frame you personally observed him on at least 2 occasions, displaying a confrontational or argumentative attitude with visitors and received one comment card from a visitor that he was rude to them.

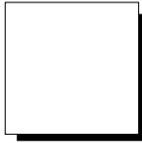
Review Tom's performance plan in Appendix A and take a few minutes to discuss at your sites whether you believe one or both of these issues are performance or conduct issues. Be ready to share your answer.

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# Prerequisites for Resolving Performance Issues

## **SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- ⇨ Follow the performance management cycle timelines
- ⇨ Make sure you have written clear Critical Elements

Critical elements are used to describe expected performance in terms that are clear, measurable, and achievable.

Critical elements must be:

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- ⇨ Investigate reasons for poor performance and examine option to improve

A job aid is provided for you in Appendix C to guide you through the investigation process.

## **Capture your notes here**

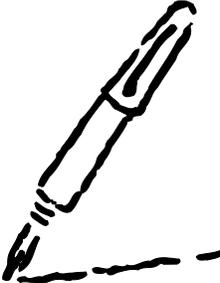
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## The Supervisor's "Drop File"

Use a Drop File to:

- Document counseling sessions
- Specific work observation or notations (both good and bad)
- Maintain personal information on your employee
- Training needs/career development
- **Remember:** Employee has a legal right to know the file exists and have access to the file.

→ Be sure that you keep this file in a locked drawer that only you can access – this is sensitive information.

There is a checklist on "Communicating Expectations & Performance Problems" for your use in Appendix B.

### Capture your notes here

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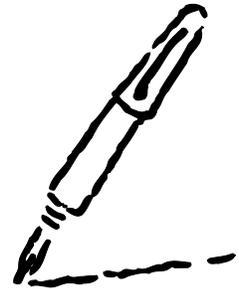
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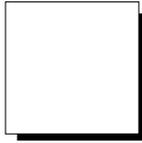
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# Informal Methods for Resolving Performance Issues

There are many ways to informally address performance issues. Be creative!

## Examples of Informal Methods

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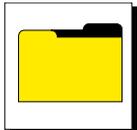
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## UPDATE ON TOM:

Good news! After an informal discussion with you on his confrontational behavior, Tom has improved his manner of communicating with visitors. He told you that he didn't realize he was coming across that way to everyone and he has worked hard to not bring his "bad mood" to work. You even received complimentary feedback from a visitor. You made sure to mention this to Tom and praise his improvements.

However, not so good news on the shift reports. Tom is still having difficulty balancing his cash drawer consistently. The error rate on his shift reports is still over 20%. During your informal counseling session with Tom, he told you that he really likes working in the entrance station and now that he is more cheerful, he really wants to do better on his paperwork. You have had him working with a more experienced VUA for the last couple of weeks to give him some additional mentoring.



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## **Formal Process: Opportunity to Improve (PIP)**



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## Exercise: Put Yourself in the Employee's Place



You have 2 minutes to complete this activity

*At your site...*

Let's reverse your role for a moment...Put yourself in Tom's place. Your supervisor has called you into the office and told you that your performance is unacceptable and you might be in big trouble if you don't straighten up. That is all you were told. The entire meeting takes no more than 2 minutes.

**What questions would you have for your supervisor?**

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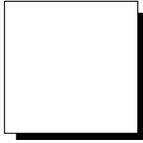
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## **NEXT STEPS: Prepare the Opportunity to Improve Letter**

**\*\*NOTE\*\* At this point you must consult with HR**

There is a sample letter in Appendix D. The key parts of the letter are:

- Identify critical result(s) and specific examples of performance that is unacceptable
- Identify time period for improvement
- State specifically what improvements are expected
- State what you, as the supervisor, will do to assist
- State what will happen if they do not improve
- Availability of EAP



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# Formal Process: Opportunity to Improve (PIP)

## Preparing for and Conducting the Formal Counseling Session

1. Contact the human resources office to seek advice on the steps to follow.
2. Before counseling, make sure you can clearly articulate what acceptable performance looks like.
3. Focus on the specific examples of unsatisfactory performance, not on personalities or other distractions. Be as specific as possible so you can respond to the question "What do you mean?"
4. If you have operating manuals, guides, or other tools that all employees use, take a look at them and see how these could be used to help the employee improve.
5. Write out and practice saying what acceptable performance in the job would mean. Be as specific as possible so you can respond to the question "What do you mean?"
6. Do not emphasize past poor performance, seek to clarify future good performance.
7. Set aside a time and location (schedule the meeting) and make it a priority for yourself.
8. Locate the Employee Assistance Program information to have available.
9. Clearly lay out the plan of action and how you will be available to assist the employee and what you will do to follow up on this session.
10. **Remember**, your goal is to improve the employee's performance.

**DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT!**

**Capture your notes here**

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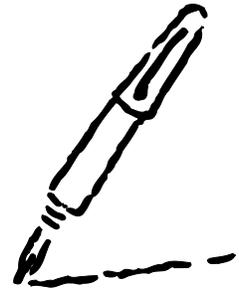
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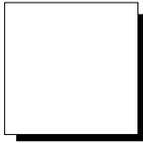
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# Outcomes of Unacceptable Performance



## UPDATE ON TOM

You gave Tom an Opportunity to Improve letter and placed him on a PIP for 90 days. You clearly outlined your expectations, provided him with assistance to succeed, and provided constant feedback to Tom during this time. Despite your best efforts, and Tom's commitment to do better, he simply does not have the ability to consistently balance his shift reports.

### NOW WHAT?

#### Options to consider:

1. Involuntary reassignment

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2. Reduction in grade

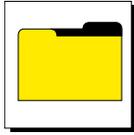
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3. Removal from service

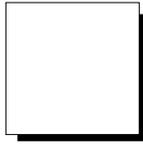
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## UPDATE ON TOM

After all of your efforts, you realize that Tom truly is a dedicated employee in the wrong job. He really wants to stay employed by NPS, and loves the park. Tom's past experience includes 2 seasons as a temporary Dispatcher at another park. There is currently a vacancy in Dispatch and with the assistance of HR work to offer Tom a reassignment to the position. Tom is disappointed and does not want to work in Dispatch because he really did not enjoy doing it as a seasonal in the other park. But, Tom's desire to remain with the NPS is stronger, so he accepts the reassignment. 90 days later, you see Tom in the parking lot and he tells you that he is really glad he took the reassignment and loves working in Dispatch. He does enjoy the work and realizes that his dislike stemmed from the experience he had at the other location.



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# Supervisor's Roles & Responsibilities

YOU play a key role in the success or failure of your employee in your efforts to improve performance and the success of your work group accomplishing their mission.

## Recap of Supervisor's Roles & Responsibilities

- ✓ Develop specific expectations (SMART)
- ✓ *Provide frequent, informal feedback*
- ✓ Identify specific examples of unacceptable performance
- ✓ Communicate specific expectations to improve
- ✓ Investigate
- ✓ Options to improve/EAP information
- ✓ Be prepared to act if PIP is unsuccessful
- ✓ *Documentation*

**Remember, your goal is to improve the performance of your employee and this takes time and effort on your part.**

## To Receive Credit for this Course

Take the on-line evaluation at

- [www.nps.gov/training/tel](http://www.nps.gov/training/tel)
- Click on the DOI Learn tab
- Go to the link under Class Evaluations for *Resolving Employee Performance Issues*
- Please complete the evaluation within 2 weeks of the course, by August 20

## **Insert Appendix A – Tom’s performance plan**

## APPENDIX B: Checklist: Communicating Expectations & Performance Problems

Supervisory Action	(Circle One)	
1. Have I determined that this is poor performance and not misconduct?	Yes	No
2. Am I following the timelines required for the annual performance management cycle and documenting this on form DI-3100?		
a. Reviewing the performance plan with the employee within 60 days of the start of the rating period.	Yes	No
b. Conducting at least 1 progress review counseling sessions during the rating period.	Yes	No
c. Reviewing the annual evaluation within 60 days after the end of the rating period.	Yes	No
3. Have I communicated the critical elements for acceptable performance to the employee? Are they in danger of failing? Are they clear and reasonable?	Yes	No
4. <b>Before</b> I talk to the employee:		
a. have I discussed with reviewing official/your supervisor?	Yes	No
b. have I provided the reviewing official with adequate documentation?	Yes	No
c. have I discussed with Human Resources?	Yes	No
5. Have I communicated to the employee:		
a. they are in danger of being rated unsatisfactory in at least one critical element?	Yes	No
b. a specific example or documentation to support the unsatisfactory performance?	Yes	No
6. Have I counseled the employee on how to improve to an acceptable level?	Yes	No

## Appendix C: Interview Worksheet—Performance

Use this form to help you document and communicate your observations to your employee, investigate reasons for poor performance and determine options to improve.

What did you observe?	
When and where did it occur?	
Who was involved?	
Has it happened before? How often?	
What was the impact on the workplace?	
ASK: Why did it happen?	
ASK: What were the circumstances?	
ASK: Did the employee seek assistance?	
Notes/Follow-Up	

Employee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Sample Letter to Inform Employee of Opportunity to Improve Performance

NOTE: Brackets below contain supervisory instructions and should not be included in the final letter. *All formal performance improvement letters should be reviewed by the Human Resources Office before being issued.*

Dear Les Wurk:

This letter *[or memorandum]* confirms our discussion of *[insert date]*, during which I informed you that you are failing to meet the critical element # *[insert number]* of your position. *[If applicable, you can summarize any informal counseling you provided to the employee in assisting him/her in improving performance.]*

Because your current performance is unsatisfactory, you will now be provided a formal opportunity to demonstrate that you can perform at the "Fully Successful" level with respect to the critical elements and performance indicators listed below. This formal opportunity will begin on *[insert date]* and end on *[insert date]*. If, as of the end of this period, your performance has not improved to the "Fully Successful" level, or if your performance does improve to the "Fully Successful" level but you do not sustain that level for at least 1 year, then you may be reassigned or a proposal may be issued to remove you from the Service or reduce you in grade. *[If applicable, you must postpone the annual rating until after the completion of the opportunity-to-improve period.]* Your annual rating for the period from *[insert date]* through *[insert date]* will be postponed until after you've completed this opportunity period.

*[If the employee is due to receive his/her within-grade increase (WGI), due to the acceptable level of competence determination, the WGI can be postponed until the end of the opportunity-to-improve period.]*

You will complete your waiting period for a within-grade increase on *[insert date]* (i.e., during your opportunity-to-improve period). Because I must certify that you are performing at an acceptable level of competence in order for you to receive your step increase, I have decided to postpone my decision regarding whether or not your performance is at an acceptable level of competence until you complete your opportunity-to-improve period. At that time, I will inform you in writing of my decision with respect to your within-grade increase. If you have demonstrated performance at an acceptable level of competence, you will receive your within-grade step increase retroactive to *[insert date]*.

The critical element(s) that you are failing and examples of your unsatisfactory performance follow:

*[State the critical element for which the employee was rated Minimally Successful or Unsatisfactory, followed by representative examples of performance for each element. Examples should be concise, direct, and easy to understand, with enough specificity so that the employee has sufficient information to know what the performance deficiencies are. As applicable, this could*

*include information on what the employee did (or did not do) with reference to specific dates, places, cases, etc., and what the employee should have done. Examples should not be broad, vague, or imprecise. As appropriate, examples should include reference to required procedures, counseling, or instructions given previously concerning the matter, and any harm caused by or resulting from the deficiency. Each example listed should have supporting documentation (e.g., if a draft letter is mentioned as an example in the opportunity letter, a copy of the draft letter should be kept as supporting documentation). The following are examples of how the elements should be listed and how the examples of "fails to meet" performance should be written.]*

**Critical Element: Fee Collection:** Collects appropriate fees at park entrance stations by following established accountability guidelines for handling government funds.

You have been rated Unsatisfactory in this critical element of your position.

As of this date, the error rate on your shift reports is 23% which places your performance in this element in the unsatisfactory rating. Specifically, your erroneous shift reports are detailed below:

Date	Amount of discrepancy	Comment
3/23/09	\$145.56	Your shift report indicated a shortage of this amount any you were unable to find the discrepancy.
4/2/09		

*[You are advised to elaborate on your interpretation of each indicator.]*

**Example:**

*[Include advice or guidance as to what must be done to bring the performance up to an acceptable level. This could include such things as how time would be best spent (prioritizing and planning), suggested sources of assistance or information, ways or techniques of performing work, formal or informal training available, etc. In conjunction with the critical element and counseling sessions or memoranda, this paragraph should make clear exactly what is expected of the employee. An example follows.]*

During your opportunity period, you will need to do the following in order to meet the fully successful level in the critical elements listed previously:

You must bring your error rate down below 20% in order to receive a minimally acceptable rating in this critical element.

*[Describe the supervisory assistance and support that will be provided to the employee. This could include any specific work reviews and/or counseling sessions planned, or other active assistance/training planned on work techniques, time management, or technical issues. An example follows.]*

You may expect the following from me to help you improve to an acceptable level:

1. I will assign a senior VUA to work with you during your shift to observe how you handle transactions and assist you several times during your schedule. The senior VUA will also go over SOPs and fee policies and procedures with you ensure you are fully aware of how to perform. I encourage you to make any additional notes in your manuals which may be of use to you.
2. During your shifts, I will be available to discuss your progress, questions, and problems. Feel free to approach me at any time to discuss your work.
3. I will meet with you every 2 weeks, or as needed, to give you ongoing feedback on your progress on each performance indicator. As you complete each assignment, I will personally review it and meet with you in order to provide you with feedback. At the conclusion of each assignment, I will provide you with a memo that conveys my appraisal of your work on that assignment. Throughout this process, I will strive to provide constructive feedback to help you improve your performance. To attain the minimum standard for retention in your position, you must meet all the performance indicators listed in the Critical Element above. Your failure to do so will result in either a reassignment to another position or a proposal to remove you from the Service or reduce you in grade.

If you believe that personal, medical, or other problems are reasons for your performance difficulties, you may provide documentation of the medical condition or raise these issues. You may also contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at *[insert telephone number]* or myself for assistance. If you wish to provide medical documentation, the Employee Relations Specialist in the Regional Personnel Office at *[insert telephone number]* will provide you with information concerning medical documentation requirements.

During your opportunity period, I will be monitoring your performance closely and, at the end of the period, I will evaluate your work and make a determination whether your performance during the period has reached the level required for retention in your position. You will be informed soon thereafter of whatever further action is to be taken.

If you have any questions on this matter, feel free to contact me. I am available to answer your questions and to assist you in improving your performance during this period.

Sincerely,

Field Supervisor

*[NOTE: in a copy of the letter, type the following for the employee to sign:]*

"I acknowledge receiving this document."

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Employee Signature

Date

## Appendix E: HELPFUL WEB SITES

### Department of the Interior

DOI Personnel Manager

[www.doi.gov/hrm/pmanager](http://www.doi.gov/hrm/pmanager)

### Office of Personnel Management:

Resource Center for Addressing and Resolving Poor Performance

[www.opm.gov/er/poor/ppp\\_tips.asp](http://www.opm.gov/er/poor/ppp_tips.asp)

Employee Relations Performance-Based Actions guidance

[www.opm.gov/er/performance.asp](http://www.opm.gov/er/performance.asp)

Human Resource Guidance

[www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/curronly.htm](http://www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/curronly.htm)

- 370 DM 430, Performance Management System
- Performance Appraisal Handbook

Any questions should be directed to your servicing Human Resource Office.