

# OCHR FACTSHEET

## Addressing Performance Deficiencies

April 2012

### PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

This Fact Sheet:

- Describes why it is important for supervisors to address performance deficiencies promptly
- Compares performance and conduct actions
- Provides information on denying a Within-Grade Increase
- Offers tips for supervisors in preventing performance issues and in holding difficult conversations

#### Introduction

Managing performance problems can be among the most difficult supervisory challenges. Supervisors are frequently hesitant to start addressing performance deficiencies because of discomfort with difficult conversations, procedural requirements, scrutiny of supervisors' execution of performance management activities, or lack of support from leadership. However, it is extremely important to address performance deficiencies promptly.

#### Why is it so Important to Handle Performance Issues?

It is very important that supervisors handle performance issues promptly and correctly for a number of reasons. Usually, if an employee is performing poorly, the situation does not improve on its own and may even get worse over time. For example, an employee may not even know that his or her performance is unacceptable until a supervisor clarifies expectations. Or an employee may not know how to get the appropriate training or resources to improve his or her performance. A simple, honest conversation would improve both situations promptly.

Allowing performance problems to continue can lead to operational disruption if work isn't being accomplished and to lowered morale for performing employees who witness the poor performance and see that no action is being taken. Sometimes supervisors find out about the importance of documenting performance issues after it's too late – the unacceptable performance has been ongoing and has gotten so difficult for the team that they are finally ready to take some action, but can't prove the performance deficiencies that have occurred because they haven't properly documented the circumstances.

#### Performance versus Conduct

Performance-based actions can be taken under 5 C.F.R. Part 752, which covers Adverse Actions, or under 5 C.F.R. Part 432, which covers Unacceptable Performance. Supervisors should be aware of the difference between a performance issue and a conduct issue so that they can take appropriate action. For additional information about which type of action to take or what steps to follow, speak with your Employee Relations Specialist.

| Performance  | Conduct  |
|--|--|
| <b>Can't</b> Situations – Employee wants to perform, but doesn't have the skills, experience, or knowledge | <b>Won't</b> Situations – Employee refuses to perform or engages in misconduct |

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q. Do I have to give an employee an “unacceptable” rating prior to putting them on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)?**

A. No. The goal of a PIP is to make a plan for improving the performance of a marginally or unacceptably performing employee. A supervisor can choose to place an employee on a PIP at any time a performance issue arises.

### **Q. What can a supervisor do to help prevent performance issues?**

A. Supervisors can take some action to help prevent poor performance from occurring. It is important to select the right people for the right positions and to make use of the probationary period as the final step in the hiring process.

Once an employee is on board, supervisors should ensure that they are communicating clear performance standards and expectations and confirming that the employee understands what is expected on a short- and long-term basis. Supervisors should provide frequent feedback on results and adjust expectations as necessary. Finally, supervisors can make sure they are recognizing good performance as a means to incentivize the right contributions.

## Performance Conversation Tips for Supervisors

When performance issues arise, supervisors should follow these tips during any performance conversations in order to help ensure a good outcome:

- Address performance problems early
- Be able to clearly state the expectations and what constitutes acceptable performance
- Be able to clearly explain what the employee can do to bring performance up to the acceptable level
- Anticipate the employee’s questions and be able to respond in a calm and professional manner
- Listen to the employee and keep the conversation professional, not personal
- Document the conversation and any other communication about performance
- Remember that the goal is to improve the employee’s performance

## Denial of a Within-Grade Increase

Within-grade Increases (WIGIs) are an increase in an employee’s basic salary and are based on a determination of acceptable level of performance at consistent, pre-established intervals. Because they are generated automatically, a supervisor must take action to deny any WIGI due to an employee whose performance is not determined to be at an acceptable level of competence at the time the WIGI is due.

Although there is no requirement that an employee be on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) prior to denying a WIGI, the employee must have a current rating of “unacceptable.”

## Still Need Assistance?

Speak with your Human Resources Professional or visit the OCHR Workforce Relations and Compensation portal for Employee Relations and Performance Management resources:

<https://www.portal.navy.mil/donhr/WorkforceRelations/Pages/Default.aspx>



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