



**Nine Essential Steps
to an
Effective Performance Improvement Plan**

*Supervisors Step-by-Step Guide to
Improve and Document Performance*

Nine Essential Steps to an Effective Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

What Performance Behaviors Should Be Documented in a PIP?

Generally, substandard employee **performance** and **misconduct** are the two most common behaviors that should be documented and addressed in a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). As you prepare the PIP, please keep in mind that the primary purpose for this plan is to help the employee to improve his job performance; to raise her quality of work or behavior to "Successful Performer" level.

Document Substandard Performance

The first type of behavior is substandard performance. An example of substandard performance behavior is an error-filled financial report that was submitted to a reporting agency. The report reflects poorly on the College and may result in a loss of funding to the College. Substandard performance is the most challenging performance issue facing managers because the employee normally has no intention of turning in substandard work. It requires a well thought-out development plan with a sustained, strategic manager/employee communication and implementation plan resulting in improvement over a reasonable period of time. In this type of performance-based issue, the employee typically cannot improve without some form of assistance.

Document Misconduct

The second type of behavior is misconduct based that impacts performance. Misconduct may be tardiness, poor attendance, or harassment behavior that results in poor work performance and is violation of a College policy. This type of behavior is more easily corrected. Sometimes, the two types of employee behaviors overlap; nevertheless, both should be documented and a plan developed to improve the employee's performance.

The likelihood of success in improving behavior largely depends on how well the supervisor manages the employee's improvement plan and how well the nine essential steps are followed. A PIP that follows the nine essential steps will either result in improved employee performance or a less desirable outcome, further disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Step One: Prepare for a face-to-face meeting with the employee

A supervisor should conduct a candid, honest, face-to-face meeting with the employee in a confidential location that provides little or no disruption. Before the meeting, a supervisor must do his/her homework by thoroughly investigating the incident, gathering information, researching HR policies, discussing the matter with superiors and/or Human Resources [HR] staff, and developing a plan of action to meet the goal of improving the employee's performance.

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It is recommended that you consult with HR prior to your meeting with the employee. Before the meeting, you should follow steps 2 through 9 below.

Step Two: Describe the policy violation, infraction, incident or behavior

Describe the policy violation, infraction, incident or behavior and include specifics such as **who, what, when, why, where** and **how**. If it is a poor quality work product or judgment issue, provide specific examples to the employee. The work product could be an employee's finished work assignment or report. During the discussion, the supervisor should focus on the results of the performance behavior, and not the individual. What are the results of the errors and how do they impact the workplace? If it is an attendance issue, cite the specific dates and times the infraction(s) occurred.

Don't use inflammatory, subjective, or vague language such as; "*You're not a team player,*" "*You're incompetent,*" or "*that was stupid.*" If you do, the employee will likely become defensive and will not be receptive to the real issues. Do address the behavior and how it impacts the workplace and department. If you have verbally discussed or counseled with the employee on this issue before, please document the dates and previous incidents. Make it a point to remind the employee that this is the second or third counseling session regarding the same or similar performance issue.

Step Three: [If possible] Connect the infraction or performance behavior to a policy

In the case of the employee who was *insubordinate*, you may cite the *insubordination* as a violation of policy. You should attach a copy of the policy to the documentation. [See College Policy B5.11.4, B5.11.5]. If no policy violation occurred, discuss the consequences of the infraction or performance issue. For example, if it is an important report that is filled with calculation errors, the supervisor should document and discuss the consequences of the poor quality work. The document may state, "*The errors in the report resulted in an audit finding costing the College \$3,400 in charge backs from the granting agency.*"

Step Four: Provide a development plan to improve the behavior

Creating a development plan is perhaps the most critical and challenging part of the documentation process. The key question is: **WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYEE'S PERFORMANCE OR PREVENT THE INFRACTION FROM RECURRING?**

If the issue is substandard performance, a thorough development plan is required. If it is a policy violation or isolated incident, a slightly different approach may be taken.

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This point can not be emphasized enough: If it is a violation of College policy, there should be documentation to include the impact of the policy violation and the consequence(s) or punishment for violating the policy.

Remember: *"The punishment should fit the crime."* Contact HR to help determine the appropriate disciplinary action as it has been applied to others for similar infractions or violations of College policy.

If it is an isolated incident, a notice should be included to warn the employee of the consequences if the infraction should occur again. A statement such as, *"a similar violation of the policy will result in action being taken against you up to and including termination"* should be included.

In addition, set **clear expectations** or **reasonable** and **measurable** standards for the employee to comply with in the future. If you are attempting to correct the misconduct, you should provide specific expectations for the employee and how the performance is impacting the department/College. A statement, for example, may include the following:

"In the future, if you are going to be late, you must call in to your supervisor 30 minutes before your normal reporting time of 8:00 am. It is important for you to cover the front desk starting at 8:00 am or for your supervisor to arrange for another employee to cover your assignment."

If it is a substandard performance issue, the supervisor should establish measurable standards of performance and/or provide a training or development plan. As the supervisor, [again] make sure the goals established are reasonable and attainable. In the case of the substandard report, a supervisor may suggest to the employee that he/she take the time to proof his/her numbers before submitting any report to the supervisor. Be as specific about the standard for errors as possible. For example, a statement may include:

"In the future, the standard for your performance is that you not have more than one calculation error per report."

In some cases, there may be a need for a training plan. An example of a specific training plan for the employee that may be included in the PIP:

"You must enroll in an advanced spreadsheet course in Excel that involves using macros, auditing a worksheet, formatting data, using analysis tools, using pivot tables, and using editing tools. You should complete this course by June 30. The College will pay for your tuition [if applicable] for the course."

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Step Five: Evaluate the employee's progress on a periodic basis

Measuring and evaluating the employee's progress is the second most critical and challenging part of the documentation process. **Communication** between the employee and supervisor is **critical**.

Periodic and scheduled meetings to review progress are strongly recommended. Most supervisors fall short on this step because there is no follow up.

When the employee is given feedback, it is an opportunity to reinforce good performance behavior or continue correcting undesirable performance. If the performance has not improved, it becomes an opportunity to discuss and correct the performance.

In your documentation, establish a time period for you to follow-up with the employee. Provide a reasonable period of time to allow for improvement and development. An example statement may include, "the reports submitted will be reviewed monthly for the next six months." The goal is to measure progress and improve your performance (as outlined in step four).

Step Six: Notify or warn the employee of consequences

Notify or warn the employee of the consequence of a repeated violation of the policy and/or provide a time frame for improved performance. In the case of the tardy employee, you may warn the employee, *"If you continue to be absent on Fridays and Mondays and your absences are unexcused and you do not call in [within the specified time period], disciplinary actions may be taken against you up to and including immediate termination."* [Try to] Always state the consequence of a repeated violation.

Step Seven: Acknowledgement and agreement by the employee

Attempt to get "buy in" from the employee. The third most critical and challenging part of the documentation process is to be assured that the employee accepts the plan of action and acknowledges that the behavior and/or performance is not acceptable. **Ask the employee** for input in the development plan. Employee agreement will greatly enhance success of the PIP. In the case of the employee coming in late, you may document, *"I believe you will agree that not calling in when you are late is a problem and you must follow the department procedure as explained to you during your orientation period."*

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In this step, a **communication** and **understanding** technique is suggested. The supervisor should ask the employee to verbalize what has been covered and what the plan of action will be in the future.

Step Eight: Sign and date the document

The employee and supervisor should sign and date the performance improvement plan document.

Document the **date** the review was conducted with the employee. If the employee does not agree with the document, allow the employee an opportunity to write on the document that he does not agree and sign. A copy should be provided to the employee and Human Resources for the employee's file.

Step Nine: Follow the Golden Rule

It takes time and effort to develop a PIP. More importantly, it may take even more time and effort to develop an employee. The level of effort by the supervisor and employee will be a worthwhile investment for the College, employee and supervisor. Remember to follow the *Golden Rule*. Treat employees as you would want to be treated. if you were in the employee's situation. It is important for the employee to feel she has been treated fairly and consistently. Allow for the PIP to be flexible and amended as needed. Always prepare your documentation as if a third party not familiar with your department or the College will be reading it. The third party reader should reach the same conclusions. It is recommended that someone from Human Resources review the document prior to discussing with the employee.

Finally, there are certain employee behaviors that should not be documented without consulting Human Resources. For example, never document or discipline an employee for exercising his constitutional rights, filing a grievance, a workers' compensation claim, or reporting a violation of the law to the appropriate authorities.

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PIP Completion

In most instances, with your assistance in coaching and monitoring performance, the employee will take the necessary steps to improve his performance. Only in rare instances will an employee fail to improve her performance. In either case, the supervisor **must** at the end of the PIP period draft a memo to the employee [with a copy to the next higher level of supervision and to human resources] indicating success or failure in improving work performance or work behavior.

If the employee did not improve performance in accordance to the PIP, the supervisor should confer with human resources to determine if the PIP should be extended or if other disciplinary action(s) should ensue.

In the appendix of this booklet, you will find examples of PIP's for your reference.

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APPENDIX I

Sample Letter # 1

June 16, 2008

TO: Kevin Kline

FROM: Marvin Smith

RE: **Attendance**

Kevin, this is to confirm our oral discussion that your attendance is in violation of TCC policy XYZ (Local) as a result of your absences from work along with your failure to contact your supervisor to notify him/her that you would not be at work. Your attendance must improve immediately to a satisfactory level and be sustained at that level in compliance with TCC's policies and practices. In the future, if you are going to be late, you must call your supervisor 30 minutes before your normal reporting time of 8:00 AM. It is important to have you covering the front counter to help students starting at 8:00 AM or for your supervisor to arrange for another employee to cover your assignment. Effective this date, no unexcused absences or tardiness to work will be allowed. Absences due to illness, accidents or other emergencies beyond your control must be confirmed by a written statement from your doctor or from an appropriate source acceptable to TCC. There will be no exceptions to this requirement.

As mentioned in our discussions, your poor attendance has negatively impacted the morale of other employees who have to perform your work for you. This has led to lower productivity and even missed schedules by our Department. This is not acceptable and will be tolerated no longer.

Your failure to comply with these directives to immediately improve and sustain all aspects of your attendance at a satisfactory level will result in further disciplinary action up to and including termination of your employment. It is our sincere hope that you fully understand the seriousness of this matter and that you will be able to improve to the attendance standards expected. We are available to assist you in any way that we can.

Marvin Smith _____ Date _____

I have read this letter and fully understand its contents.

Kevin Kline _____ Date _____

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Sample Letter # 2

August 17, 2006

TO: Kevin Kline

FROM: Marvin Smith

RE: **Attendance**

Kevin, this is the second written correspondence with you concerning your continued poor attendance and follows numerous oral discussions that your attendance is unsatisfactory. You have chosen not to comply with the written directive you received dated March 29, 2004 or with the repeated oral discussions that your performance had to improve. Your most recent unexcused absence yesterday, June 16, 2004, is just another example of your disregard of repeated requests to improve your attendance and sustain it at a satisfactory level. Your failure to improve your attendance has caused lost productivity, missed schedules and lowered morale within the Department.

Due to your continued failure to comply with the requirement to improve your attendance, you remain in violation of TCC Policy DH (Local). As a result, you will be suspended three days without pay commencing June 17. You will be required to return to work on June 23, 2004 and to sustain satisfactory attendance from that time forward. There will be no further warnings and failure to comply with this correspondence and improve and sustain your attendance at acceptable levels will result in your termination of employment.

Once again, we remain available to assist you in any way that we can. We sincerely hope that you will comply.

Marvin Smith _____ Date _____

I have read and fully understand that my failure to comply with this directive to improve my attendance to a satisfactory level and sustain my attendance at that level in the future will result in termination of my employment from TCC.

Kevin Kline _____ Date _____

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Sample Letter # 3

July 17, 2004

TO: Susan Rodgers
FROM: Kathy Watson
RE: Reporting Errors

Susan, this is to confirm our oral discussion regarding the number of errors from major reports to external reporting agencies that are significantly impacting the College and your performance. Your July 12, 2004 IPAX Report to the Department of Education had numerous calculation errors. The errors in the report could result in an audit finding costing the College up to \$3,400 in charge backs from the Department of Education.

In the future, I recommend that you take time to proof your numbers before submitting any report to an external agency or to me. The standard for your performance is that you not have more than one calculation error per report each quarter. I suggest the following to help you achieve this goal. You should enroll in an advanced spreadsheet course in Excel that involves using macros, auditing a worksheet, formatting data, using analysis tools, using pivot tables, and using editing tools. You should complete this course by September 30. The College will pay for your tuition for the course. You will attend this class outside of normal work hours.

I will be meeting with you within the next six weeks to review your progress on reducing errors. I believe you will agree that reporting errors are a serious problem and there must be greater accuracy in your work. As mentioned in our discussions, inaccurate reports will not be tolerated. Your failure to comply with these standards to improve and sustain all aspects of performance at a satisfactory level will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of your employment.

It is our sincere hope that you fully understand the seriousness of this matter and that you will be able to improve to the standards expected. I am available to assist you in any way that I can.

Marvin Smith _____ Date _____

I have read this letter and fully understand its contents.

Susan Rodgers _____ Date _____

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APPENDIX II Sample form

Employee Name:	CWID No.:	Position Title:
Department and/or Division	Name of Supervisor	Telephone [Ext.]

List responsibilities that need improvement and describe the corresponding plan for improvement:

Factor(s) (Job knowledge; Problem Solving)	Specific Responsibility	PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT (training, coaching, monitoring, etc.)	DATE ASSESSMENT COMPLETED
Quantity of Work	<p>Complete two State reports to IA Plus and to AppleTurnover must be submitted quarterly. These reports have been late.</p> <p>Inform departments when Limpudy data is due agencies</p>	<p>Make a list of all reports that are due. Keep this list somewhere on you desk. Write down what you will need to complete each report. Determine how long it will take to complete the report (add extra week for unexpected problems). You will submit this report to Oprah one week before it is due.</p> <p>You will contact IT to run report You will send email to all departments. Two days before info is due to this office. Every Monday, talk with Arnold Swartnugard when have you made the request to IT</p>	

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Employee Comments:

I _____ Agree Disagree with the plan above.
(Employee Signature)

Supervisor Signature _____ Date: _____

Reviewer Signature: _____ Date: _____

<p>Follow-up Review: (to be completed within 3-6 months of annual review date)</p> <p>___ Employee has achieved required improvements described above. ___ Employee has not achieved the required improvements described above.</p> <p>Follow-up Review Signatures: Employee: _____ Date: _____ Supervisor: _____ Date: _____</p>

Copies to:
[Employee
Next Level Supervisor,
Human Resources]

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Provisions and Information

The provisions and information set forth in this booklet are intended to be informational and not contractual in nature. This booklet is not intended, and shall not be construed, to constitute a contract between The Del Mar College District and any employee, agencies of the local, state, or federal government, or any other person or legal entity of any and every nature whatsoever. Del Mar College hereby reserves and retains the right to amend, alter, change, delete, or modify any of the provisions of this booklet at any time, and from time to time, without notice, in any manner that the Administration or the Board of Regents of College deems to be in the best interest of Del Mar College.

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