



SORDILL CONSULTING
Organizational Training & Development

Tips to Avoid Performance Problems

SORDILL CONSULTING is pleased to introduce a newsletter designed to provide you with tips and strategies for practical use by executives, managers and staff members.

We will publish the newsletter on line at our web site – www.sordill.com, distribute the newsletter via email or through the US mail. You tell us which you prefer.

In our first issue we'll discuss Tips to Avoid Performance Problems. We hope you'll learn some new strategies for increasing your success as a manager and facilitating individual success of your team members.

SORDILL CONSULTING was founded in 1985 by Pat Sordill. We specialize in communication, interpersonal relations and

self-management skills training and development for executives, managers, and staff members. Programs are designed to be interactive and flexible to meet individual and organizational needs.

In addition to training and development, we also offer executive and individual coaching services.

A complete list of programs and services are included with this newsletter. Please let us know how we can help you increase your individual and organizational success.

Call Pat Sordill at 978-266-9524 or feel free to send an email to: pat@sordill.com.

Thanks, we hope you enjoy the newsletter.

TIPS TO AVOID PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

One of the most time consuming functions of management is dealing with performance problems. The point of this set of tips is to provide you with suggestions which will increase positive performance and reduce the need for interventions due to poor performance and lack of motivation. As with anything of value, there is an investment in the process.

The more effective you are at developing a set of dependable standards and behaviors for working with employees, the less time you will have to devote to solving problems and dealing with poor performance. The following tips are tried and true when used consistently and with appropriate flexibility to accommodate the individuals you manage as well as the demands of your organization.

1. *Define and communicate:*
 - a. your role
 - b. the role you expect of your employees

Have job descriptions for yourself and all of your staff members. Update them on an annual basis by reviewing current and anticipated business needs. Include employees in the process of updating their job descriptions. Share your job description with employees. Talk about how you can help each other achieve success and what you are expecting of employees in the fulfillment of their tasks and responsibilities.

2. *Clarify and communicate standards and expectations for:*
 - a. yourself
 - b. your employees

Discuss measures for success. Be clear about how you will be assessing and evaluating their performance. Let them know what you think is important and why. Tell employees what they can expect from you. Ask what they need from you in order to do their job well. Make this a two way conversation. Plan to have this type of conversation at least once per year to make sure you avoid surprises and incorrect assumptions.

When changes occur in the job, tasks or assignments of either yourself or employees, be sure to sit down and discuss why the changes are being made, what that means and how it will affect them.

3. *Make communication two way by:*
 - a. asking open ended questions
 - b. listening to understand
 - c. responding appropriately to be understood

Open ended questions are questions that allow the other person to tell their "story." Some examples include: In what ways has your job changed over the past six months? What is preventing you from doing the job as well as you'd like? How can I help you accomplish your goals?

Closed ended questions are questions that elicit specific information. Examples include: Are you enjoying your work? Am I giving you enough support to do your job well? Have you been able to meet your goals?

Open ended questions encourage dialogue and provide an opportunity to gather more information. Additionally, open ended questions help avoid assumptions about what is understood or intended.

We learn when we listen. Suspend assumptions, remain open and objective, ask questions and paraphrase to verify that you've heard correctly.

Always use a respectful tone of voice, language, and demeanor. If you disagree with the other person, do so with respect and ask questions to understand why they have their perspective.

Collaborate to establish common ground, understanding, and to clarify appropriate next steps or actions to be taken.

4. *Create a motivational environment, build rapport, and demonstrate respect by:*
 - a. trying to see things from other's point of view
 - b. find out what is important to others
 - c. reward in ways that are meaningful to employees
 - d. learning from others
 - e. encouraging others to solve problems
 - f. allowing others to do their job without unnecessary interference

If you want employees to perform at peak levels, they need to see value in the work they do.

Take the time to learn what's important to them. Treat people as they want to be treated and reward them in ways that are meaningful to them.

Allow employees to stretch and grow. Encourage employees to take on new tasks and roles and stay out of their way as they work toward goal achievement.

People don't make mistakes on purpose. When mistakes occur, treat them as learning experiences. Ask employees to identify what they could have done better and how they can use the experience to increase their expertise in the future. Provide feedback and suggestions for growth. Assume everyone is doing his or her best and if there is a failure, ask yourself what you could have done better to prepare them, teach them, and help them develop.

5. *Provide opportunities for development by:*
 - a. setting mutually agreed upon ASMAART goals
 - b. asking employees to assess their performance and progress
 - c. providing feedback and coaching on performance
 - d. delegating responsibilities and authority to get the job done
 - e. allowing time necessary to accomplish goals and complete tasks

ASMAART goals are goals that are Agreed Upon, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed. Setting goals is appropriate when there are changes in responsibility or authority, performance needs improvement, or you are delegating new tasks.

- **Agreed Upon** means that the employee and the manager each have input to defining the goals. Managers should identify areas in which they would like the employee to develop. Employees should identify areas in which they would like to grow. Collaboratively, they should work out the remainder of the process to achieve maximum results.
- **Specific** means clearly stating the desired results. Using concrete statements regarding exactly what is to be accomplished. Clearly stating your intended results provides a target to strive for.
- Some goals are more easily **measured** through numerical assessments, others need to be more descriptive. To set descriptive measures, define the current situation using facts and concrete examples. Then define the desired situation in the same manner. You can use behaviors and results, specific examples of situations or completed tasks and assignments to create measures of successful goal achievement.
- Making goals **achievable** means ensuring the employee has the skills, knowledge, resources, support, and/or potential to achieve the goal. List actions to be taken, resources needed, and clarify roles and responsibilities. Ask the employee what they will need to achieve the goal. Discuss potential obstacles to goal achievement.
- To ensure the goal is **realistic**, ask why the goal is important and determine in what ways it makes sense for this person's development, the group's success, or the company's purpose. It is also important to assess the goal at interim points to ensure the goal still makes sense as time passes.
- **Timed** means that goals need a beginning and an ending point. Determine when they will begin working on the goal and when they expect to have completed the goal. You should also include interim measures on the time line to assess progress and make decisions that will ensure success. Go back and reassess whether this goal still makes sense. Determine how the employee is doing in achieving the measures set forth. Look at the time line and decide if the end date is still realistic or if the goal should be adapted in some way to ensure success.

Employees should be partners in the process of defining SMART goals, however, the degree of input will vary depending on the expertise, knowledge and experience of the employee.

If you are working with an inexperienced employee, you as the manager will have to provide a greater depth of input than if you are working with an experienced employee. It is critical that you adapt your strategies to the needs of the employee and the level of contribution they are able to make to the process of defining goals.

6. *Practice open communication by:*
 - a. communicating regularly about:
 - i. progress
 - ii. achievements and contributions

- iii. areas for improvement
- iv. employee input
- b. sharing information that will enable others to understand:
 - i. goals
 - ii. value of contributions
 - iii. changes
 - iv. future organizational needs
- c. modeling desired behaviors:
 - i. saying what you mean
 - ii. meaning what you say
 - iii. listening to understand
 - iv. considering the input of others
 - v. taking responsibility for yourself
 - vi. demonstrating dependability
 - vii. acting with consistency
 - viii. communicating with congruence

Avoiding performance problems is an ongoing investment in yourself as a manager, the company, and employees. The better you are at managing the process before there are problems, the more time you will save and the more loyalty you will foster among your employees.

7. Follow established chains of command, company policies and procedures

You are a role model for your employees. Be aware of company policies and procedures and follow them. Utilize your company's Human Resources professionals to support your performance management efforts.

Even the best managers sometimes have to deal with performance problems. In our next issue of the newsletter, we'll provide *Tips for Handling Performance Problems*.

For more information about programs and services, please call Pat Sordill at 978-266-9524 or send an email to: pat@sordill.com.

If you would prefer **to receive future newsletters by email**, please send your email address to pat@sordill.com with a note indicating your preference to receive the newsletter by email.

SORDILL CONSULTING
Organizational Training and Development
120 Patch Hill Road, Boxborough, MA 01719
(978) 266-9524
FAX (978) 266-9534
Email: pat@sordill.com
www.sordill.com

Patricia A. Sordill, President

A graduate of Boston University with both a BSBA and EdM, Pat Sordill is founder and president of **SORDILL CONSULTING**, a consulting firm specializing in customized training and development services.

As a consultant to both the private and public sectors, Pat has designed, delivered and supported training and development programs since 1985 for organizations across the US. Her specialties are communication, interpersonal relations, and self-management skill sets for management, supervisors, individual contributors and support staff. She has had proven success with both technical and non-technical personnel. As an independent consultant, Pat has worked with tens of thousands of individuals in their quest for ongoing development and continuing success in their professions.

As past President of the Boxborough Business Association, and the Acton Chamber of Commerce, and individual member of the American Society for Training, Pat has demonstrated a commitment to the business community and the field of training and development.

Pat's successful consulting and speaking assignments have included custom designed programs on the following topics:

- Assertive Communication Skills
- Change Management
- Coaching, Feedback, and Communication
- Communication Strategies
- Conflict Management
- Customer Service & Telephone Skills
- Executive Coaching
- Facilitation
- Getting Organized
- Goal Setting and Achievement
- Handling Problem Employees and Terminations
- Individual Professional Development
- Interviewing Techniques
- Leadership Skills
- Listening Skills
- Managerial and Supervisory Skills
- Managing Up
- Managing Interpersonal Relations
- Meeting Management
- Mentoring
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator
- Motivation
- Negotiating for Success
- One on One Coaching
- Organizational Skills
- Outdoor & Executive Challenge
- Performance Management
- Performance Reviews
- Presentation Skills
- Problem Solving Techniques
- Project Management
- Sales and Sales Management
- Sexual Harassment Awareness
- Strategic Planning
- Stress Management
- Team Development
- Time Management
- Train the Trainer